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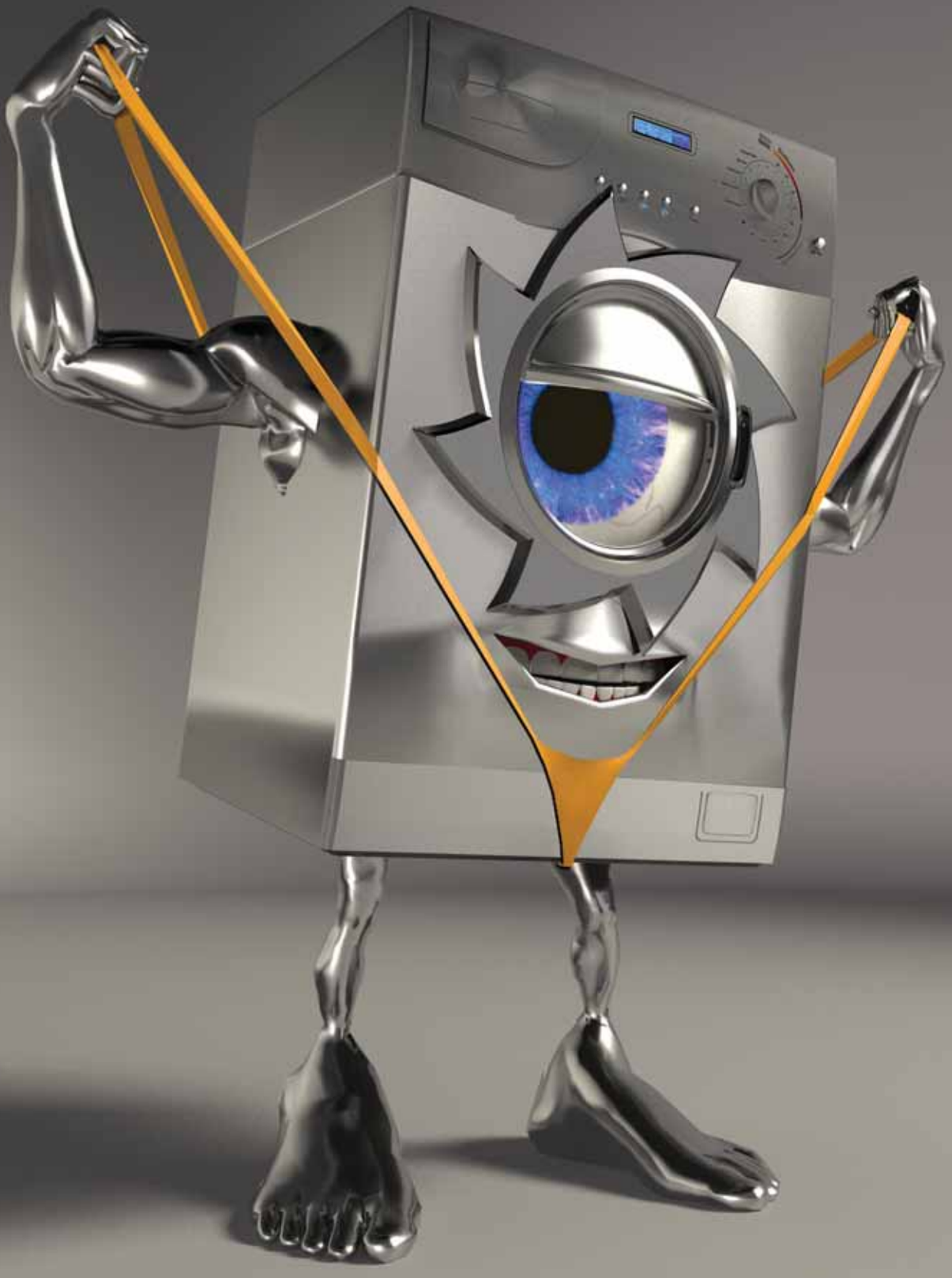

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ALPHA

ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

"The danger now is that publishing executives reign in not just cost, but ambition too…"
Owain Bennallack, p14

We talk to new studio Lightning Fish
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Develop Awards return in July

Categories for 2009 confirmed | Month-long lobbying period now open for all studios | Ceremony set for July 15th

The Develop Awards will take place on July 15th, returning to the Hilton Metropole Hotel in Brighton.

Now in their seventh year, the Develop Awards recognise the innovations and successes of studios in the UK and Europe.

Key winners last year heralded from all over the industry, including Rockstar North, Splash Damage, Nintendo, Frontier, Richard Jacques, Babel Media, NaturalMotion, Epic Games, Realtime Worlds, Image Metrics and Doublesix.

17 awards are up for grabs this year, from Best New IP, Best In-House Studio and Best New Studio through to Visual Arts, Audio Accomplishment and Creative Outsourcing – and lobbying is now open to those who think they should be in the running.

A full list of awards is printed below, with a fuller breakdown explaining each award printed on page 24.

To put the efforts of your company or another forward for a prize, email a short description of the studio/game/business and its achievements to *Develop*'s **Michael.French@intentmedia.co.uk**.

Lobbying is free and you have until May 13th to get your submissions in. At that point the *Develop* team will consider all suggestions before deciding on a shortlist, after which some 100 judges from across the sector will be invited to vote for the winners.

Those victorious will then find out on the night of July 15th if they have won at the Awards ceremony itself.

And don't forget to book your place at what will certainly be the biggest night on the calendar for UK and European games developers – contact **Jodie.Holdway@bhpr.co.uk** for more info.

Also contact Jodie if you are interested in finding out more about the many sponsorship and promotional opportunities available at the event.

Rockstar and its North team took home a plethora of prizes in 2008

DEVELOP AWARDS 2009

CREATIVITY
Best New IP
Best Use of a Licence or IP
Visual Arts
Audio Accomplishment
Publishing Hero

TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES
Technical Innovation
Best Tools Provider
Creative Outsourcing
Services
Recruitment Company

STUDIOS
Best New Studio
Business Development
Best Handheld Games Studio
Best Independent Developer
Best In-house Developer

SPECIAL INDUSTRY RECOGNITION AWARDS
Development Legend
Grand Prix

Editorial

Press ganged

I ended up leaving GDC with two sore feet (no surprise when you spend five days running back and forth across a square mile of San Francisco), a wodge of new business cards ('Hello', new LinkedIn friends)... and a bee in my bonnet (metaphorically – although the weather was grand).

My last appointment of the week was with a small Dutch WiiWare developer. We were all tired after a week of meetings, but they did the dutiful pitch and I asked questions. More on that team, *De Blob* creators Ronimo, will be available soon on developmag.com. But I was shocked at the end of our chat, when the team admitted that talking to a journalist, any journalist, came as a relief – they had been rebuffed by online 'giants' of games journalism, who said they were too busy to see them.

Now, I'm not trying to relay a sob story here, but when GDC has evolved into a great show with a media circus wrapped around it, I'm dismayed at this kind of behaviour by the press. They're happy to go and post salacious headlines about Blizzard and a non-existent Xbox 720, or queue up during session Q&As to ask irrelevant leading questions, but when it comes to talking to up and coming talent – the kind of developers that make GDC what it is – they just can't be bothered. Shocking and shameful.

This of course leads to a wider point about the age crisis that I think the industry will soon find itself on the brink of. As Seamus Blackley points out on page eight, the young guns of today are absent – in his words, they are 'World War One teenagers', a missing generation. Nintendo or Apple creating open platforms is great, but if the press can't even be bothered to help promote those competent kids that are around and are hoping to crack into the industry then we are surely fucked.

Hopefully, with categories like Best New Studio and Best Handheld Studio, the Develop Awards can help promote new talents targetting new platforms – as well as the many European 'grown up' studios (see the guide on page 24 for more info on the event) – but I think there is a clear responsibility that lies with the mainstream press when it comes to talking developers.

Yes, you can have all the outrageous quotes you like from the stars of today – but you've got to be prepared to promote the luminaries of tomorrow, too.

Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Lightning Fish is fighting Fit

Ambitious new UK studio looks to beat Nintendo at its own game with new peripheral-based exercise, lifestyle and family games

by Michael French

At GDC last month, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata told attendees to his keynote that third-parties can compete with his development teams on Wii and DS, despite conventional wisdom to the contrary.

And now a new UK studio isn't just looking to prove him right – but event beat Nintendo's money-spinning *Wii Fit* title while it's at it.

In just under a year on the shelf, *Wii Fit* has generated over £120m at UK retail, with 17m Balance Boards sold – and now Lightning Fish wants a slice of the action.

Founded last year by experienced industry veterans Simon Prytherch, former Bitmap Brother Mike Montgomery and David Hunt, the team already has a Wii fitness title signed and due for release later in the summer, *NewU:Inside Out*. The team also has MAME creator Nicola Salmoria on board as senior programmer.

"What we want to do is aim at a wider family audience rather than the hardcore gamer," CEO Prytherch explained to *Develop* at GDC.

"There's not a lot of kudos in the games industry doing that kind of thing – but it enabled us to start the company and we're keen to keep focusing on that kind of area in future."

NewU is aimed at 30-plus women, and when Wii global shipment levels have already tipped 50m, it's a proposition not to be sniffed at.

The firm is now pitching new lifestyle games and fitness concepts to publishers and format-holders. "It's an area that doesn't have huge budgets, but is a hot genre – we're not just pitching fitness products, but also family oriented sports and entertainment titles," said Prytherch.

Lightning Fish is also registered as a PS3 and 360 developers, and Prytherch points out that the two formats have their own motion-based peripherals – cameras. "[The format holders'] eyes have lit up at the concepts we are showing to them. Because the kind of things we are doing on Wii don't look like a 'normal' Wii title," he explained.

> ***"The things we are doing don't have the usual low-end Wii production values."***
>
> Simon Prytherch

NewU features video rather than the low-end graphics usually seen on the format – helped in part due to the fact that Lightning Fish now owns a video studio, acquired after a neighbouring kids' TV production house went bust.

"The good thing about doing a video-based game is it is very quick to put together, but does have its own headaches," Prytherch added. Lightning Fish has had to devise a new approach to traditional green screen recording, including introducing ways of shooting from multiple angles to ensure plenty of content for the Wii.

The studio is looking at other ways of better owning the production process and controlling its destiny, too – it was the studio that signed up *You Are What You Eat* as nutrition expert and got gym franchise Fitness First on board to supply exercise advice. A follow-up celebrity version after is a no-brainer.

The game is packed with other smart hooks too – it links with a website where you can view recipes and download shopping lists for ingredients to complement the in-game exercises.

"The ultimate aim is to offer the definitive fitness and lifestyle product, and something that doesn't fall into the trap of looking like 'an average Wii product.' Because people do write some of the titles off now as being too kiddy or low-end," explained Prytherch.

Lightning Fish's Simon Prytherch (above left) says his studio's Balance Board game puts NIntendo's Wii Fit to shame

"We did a lot of focus testing on *Wii Fit*. The two things that came back from our core market was that they thought Nintendo's game was too childish and gamey due to the style and interface, and the other was that *Wii Fit* doesn't let them target certain fitness results.

"I don't like the word 'casual' as these products are bigger than what you think of as 'casual', which is web games. But what's happened is that we all have families now, and playing games with them and a desire to play the games we make with them has inspired a move towards this kind of product," he added.

And in the face of a climate where many developers are pointing to digital distribution as key to their future, Prytherch is looking the other way, and points out that retail is still key to the success of mass-market products. Publishing partner Black Bean also works with peripheral firm Blaze, which means Lightning Fish could find itself being the next Red Octane or Harmonix, devising peripheral-based games that rake it in at retail.

"Retail are much more open to those kind of ideas, given the success of *Guitar Hero* and *Wii Fit* – so we're looking at ideas that come with peripherals that fit into boxes like the *Mario Kart Wii* package. Something good-sized for retailers but economic for the consumer too," he explained.

"I've always thought that plastic controllers like those on the 360 and PS3 are too intimidating to most people – I think there's lots more we can do with user interfaces beyond what has already been done in order to keep players entertained."

www.lightningfishgames.com

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Paris GDC sessions detailed
Autodesk to hold education summit
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Rainbow Studios vets form TimeFly
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‘Mind the gap,’ says Blackley

Xbox creator turned Hollywood agent says industry must find new talent or it will struggle

by Michael French

The man who co-created Microsoft’s games console, and now brokers big talent deals between headline development personalities and publishers like EA, has warned of a generation gap facing the industry talent base.

Speaking at the VentureBeat-hosted GamesBeat event running alongside last months’ GDC, Seamus Blackley – the former Xbox man and previous *Develop* columnist, now head of Hollywood agency CAA’s games division – urged the industry to ‘reclaim’ the lost generation of game designers.

“There’s a whole generation of games designers that are absent – it’s like the World War One 19 year-olds, they’ve vanished. The Will Wrights, the Warren Spectors, the Sid [Meiers], the Tim Schaffers – we can give those guys what they want, and do large deals for them. But there is no generation after them,” he said.

He dismissed the industry’s current ways of finding new talent, suggesting that ‘taking three great graduates and putting them to work on the next *Godfather* game’ squanders their potential.

“That [approach is] a fine business decision, but the perspective for us is that it is a much better idea to take these three guys who perhaps have a beautiful idea and a different way of working, protect them a little bit as they build up a new idea and a new way of looking at things and a new way of design – and a few years from now they will be a much better business,” Blackley explained. “In the ‘90s there was no mechanism to do that – and we lost a generation of designers. I think it’s important we look to reclaim that new generation. And for a variety of reasons; there aren’t that many Will Wrights in the world, so at CAA I have to grow my business somehow!”

But the comments came not just as a pitch to explain why CAA was carving a place for developers to have the kind of agents usually boasted by thesps – it was part of a wider message in which he said the industry must continually look to improve itself.

“Just as a lot of people in games view the movie business as this unstoppable cloud of money, people in the movie business think the same thing about the games business,” he said of his experiences at CAA.

In all, he suggested that the games industry must make sure it doesn’t fall into bad habits: “Great projects happen when a lot of people put a lot of effort into making them happen. Previously these happened organically, but as the model matures and the industry around that matures, people become set in their ways.”

Seamus Blackley on stage at the 2009 VentureBeat-hosted GamesBeat event that ran alongside GDC

DEVELOP DIARY

YOUR COMPLETE GAMES DEVELOPMENT EVENT CALENDAR FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD...

14-16 JULY 2009 develop in brighton

DEVELOP CONFERENCE 2009
July 14th to 16th
Brighton, UK
www.develop-conference.com

The Develop Conference and Expo is where the European development community comes together to learn from each other and share experiences, be inspired by world renowned experts and gurus, get up-to-date with the latest development tools and techniques, make new contacts and catch-up with old ones.

Over the last three years the Develop Conference and Expo has rapidly established itself as the leading event for games design and development professionals in Europe. Last year, over 1,200 developers from every level of the development community descended on Brighton to meet, learn, share and network with their peers.

APRIL 2009

MCV INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
April 23rd
London, UK
www.mcvuk.com/events

MAY 2009

GDC CANADA
May 12th to 13th
Vancouver, Canada
www.gdc-canada.com

NORDIC GAME 2009
May 19th to 20th
Malmo, Sweden
www.nordicgame.com

MCV/XBOX 360 PUB QUIZ
May 21st
London, UK
www.mcvuk.com/events

JUNE 2009

E3
June 2nd to 4th
Los Angeles, USA
www.e3expo.com

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE
June 23rd to 24th
Newcastle, UK
www.gamehorizonconference.com

IDEF
June 30th to July 2nd
Cannes, France
www.idefexpo.com

JULY 2009

DEVELOP CONFERENCE 2009
July 14th to 16th
Brighton, UK
www.develop-conference.com

DEVELOP INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
July 15th
Brighton, UK
www.developmag.com/develop-awards

CASUAL CONNECT SEATTLE
July 21st to 23rd
Seattle, US
www.develop-conference.com

GAMES CONVENTION ONLINE
July 31st to August 2nd
Leipzig, Germany
www.gamesconvention.com

AUGUST 2009

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE
August 10th to 16th
Edinburgh, Scotland
www.edinburghinteractivefestival.com

GDC EUROPE
August 17th to 19th
Cologne, Germany
www.gdceurope.com

GAMESCOM
August 19th to 23rd
Cologne, Germany
www.gamescom-cologne.com

CHINA GDC
August 27th to 29th
Shanghai, China
www.chinagdc.com

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*DreamWorks used the HP xw8600 Workstation in Monsters vs. Aliens™

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WorldView

Our monthly digest of the past month's global games news…

DEALS

Xsens' mocap tech has been picked up by **Insomniac** and **ImageWorks**.

Havok Behaviour was used to power **Ubisoft**'s *Six Flags Fun Park*, while its Havok Complete has been signed up by **CD Projekt**.

Curve Studios has adopted **Hansoft**'s management solution.

Xaitment's AI technology is the latest to feature integration into **Emergent**'s Gamebryo.

BigWorld 2.0 is to feature **Nvidia**'s PhysX physics tech.

Autodesk has teamed up with **NaturalMotion** to integrate Kynapse and morpheme 2.0.

Vivox will be providing voice chat services for **Realtime Worlds**' All Points Bulletin.

Glu has extended its partnership to make mobile versions of **Activision**'s games.

amBX has partnered with **Carnegie Mellon University** to install its tech at the site.

Acclaim has signed with the **Sci Fi Channel** to develop new properties.

CRI Middleware and **Scaleform** have teamed up for version 2.0 of CRI Movie.

BROOMHALL HONOURED AT G.A.N.G. AWARDS

Audio consultant, long-time industry stalwart and, above all, super *Develop* columnist John Broomhall has been honoured at the 2009 Game Audio Network Guild (G.A.N.G) Awards, receiving the GANG Recognition Award for his numerous services to the field of audio in games.

Broomhall worked as head of audio for MicroProse, Spectrum Holobyte, Hasbro Interactive and Infrogrames UK, where he worked on classic titles such as *Sid Meier's Civilization*, *UFO: Enemy Unknown* and *MechWarrior 3*. He set up his own consultancy Broomhall Projects in 2003, and has contributed to modern classics such as *Heavenly Sword* and *Guitar Hero*.

John's tireless efforts to champion the role of audio in games, including chairing and steering the Develop Conference's Audio track and his contributions to BAFTA, make him a well-deserved winner. Congratulations from everyone at *Develop*!

MARYLAND, USA

BIG LOSSES AT BIG HUGE

At the time of going to press, *Develop* had been informed that a huge wave of layoffs had hit Baltimore-based studio Big Huge Games, the creators of the *Rise of Nations* series and most recently developers of the Xbox Live Arcade favourite *Catan*. It had been working with *Oblivion* co-creator Ken Rolston on a 'Big Huge RPG'.

THQ had announced several weeks previously that the studio would be shut down if it was not able to find a buyer.

www.bighugegames.com

CAMBRIDGE, UK

ZOONAMI GOES BONKERS FOR BONSAI BARBER

Those clever folks at Zoonami finally revealed the project they've been toiling away on for quite some time: a WiiWare title called *Bonsai Barber*. A casual game that utilises the Wiimote and Nunchuck as clippers and shears, *Bonsai Barber* challenges players to trim the foliage-based outcrops on the heads of various characters. It's out now, and costs 1000 Wii Points.

www.zoonami.com

CALIFORNIA, USA

GAMESPY PILOTS INDIE SCHEME

The popular online middleware provider has aunched a pilot program called GameSpy Indie that is designed to aid small and independent developers. With the new program, GameSpy Technology is now being made available to small-scale studios that can benefit from online services that may have been unavailable in the past due to resource or implementation barriers.

www.poweredbygamespy.com

FLORIDA, USA

DREAMRIFT AT EA TIBURON

The team behind EA's latest DS title, *Henry Hatsworth & The Puzzling Adventure*, has announced at GDC the formation of DreamRift, a new independent studio. *Hatsworth* lead designer Pete Ong and lead programmer Ryan Pijai have formed the team, joined by a number of unnamed staff that have worked on games including *Dementium: The Ward* and *Tony Hawk's Project 8*.

www.dreamrift.com

NOTTINGHAM, UK

MONUMENTAL WINS BUSINESS AWARD

Monumental has been named 'Innovative Business of the Year' at the Fast Growth Business Awards 2009. The judging panel, which included *Dragons' Den* star James Caan, said that it felt Monumental Games could be a household name within a few years, and that it has "both innovative technology and an innovative approach to business, licensing their technology to other game creators and also producing their own games." CEO Rik Alexander said it was "humbling" to receive the award.

www.monumentalgames.com

TEXAS, USA

WINDSTORM FROM THE ENSEMBLE TEACUP

In further good news, a third studio has been set up in the wake of the demise of Ensemble Studios. Founded by president Dusty Monk, Windstorm Studios is working on bringing 'a new era to online gaming'.

A statement from Monk on the site says: "In 2008, when Microsoft closed my then employer Ensemble Studios, I saw an opportunity for something new – not just for myself, but for the genre which I love so much. Windstorm Studios is the realisation of that opportunity."

www.windstormstudios.com

HAMPSHIRE, UK

NDREAMS UNVEILS ARG FOR PLAYSTATION HOME

Those thinking that PlayStation Home just wasn't gamey enough can now be silenced, thanks to nDreams' new alternate reality game for the service. Based in hidden locations throughout Home, *Xi* challenges players to follow an adventure that features clues hidden in-game, across the web and in the real world. To keep the narrative of the game secret, presently very few details of *Xi*'s workings have been confirmed, but interested parties can look at the graffiti in

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ONLIVE IS ALIVE

CLOUD COMPUTING HAS BEEN a hot topic in the IT sector over the past year or so, but so far its gaming uses have been thin on the ground. A new company, OnLive, used GDC to make a big announcement, however: a new on-demand service that claims to centralise all code and assets on a remote server, with games playable by users accessing the content across a high-speed internet connection.

All the computing and processing takes place on the remote servers, and just as the video feed of the game is streamed to the user across the internet.

According to the company, lag is virtually nonexistent – just 1ms – and only a 1.5meg connection is required for a 60fps SD display, with HD requiring a five meg line.

Importantly, a number of leading publishers have reportedly signed up to the service – including EA, Take-Two, Ubisoft, Epic, Atari, Codemasters, Warner and Eidos. Going forward, OnLive is suggesting that titles could arrive on its service alongside their 'proper' retail release.

Quite whether or not it'll work will remain up in the air for the moment, however, as no release date has been announced.

www.onlive.com

Home's main square to get started.
www.ndreams.co.uk

LONDON, UK
HEADSTRONG GETS FUCKED

In news that makes us genuinely proud to be British, London-based developer Headstrong has been awarded a Guiness World Record as the 'most profane game ever'. *House of the Dead: Overkill* features the word 'fuck' a whopping 189 times. "Parodying the profane excess of grindhouse cinema was Headstrong's objective and I am flattered that this record acknowledges that we not only rose to that challenge, but entirely exceeded it," said Jonathan Burroughs, writer of the game.
www.headstrong-games.com

NEW YORK, USA
IGA IN TROUBLE

In-game ad specialist IGA Worldwide is trying to close a new round of funding – and has put itself up for sale. The company's chairman Justin Townsend told VentureBeat that it would prefer to finish closing a third round of funding within a matter of weeks, but that they 'had a fiduciary duty to shareholders to explore the sale of the company'.
www.igaworldwide.com

Top 10: Developers Chart: March 2009

1.	**Capcom**	**Japan**	**Resident Evil 5**
2.	**Nintendo**	**Japan**	**Wii Fit**
3.	**Guerrilla Games**	**Holland**	**Killzone 2**
4.	Ensemble Studios	USA	Halo Wars
5.	Ubisoft Romania	Romania	T. Clancy's HAWX
6.	Level 5	Japan	Professor Layton
7.	Treyarch	USA	CoD: World at War
8.	Creative Assembly	UK	Empire: Total War
9.	EA Canada	Canada	FIFA 09
10.	Yuke's	Japan	WWE: Legends

Chart Supplied By: **Chart***Track* charttrack.co.uk | **ELSPA** elspa.com

SAY WHAT?!?

"I've come to understand that Western game design is more technology-driven, whereas we do more 'designer-driven' game design."

Hideo Kojima shares his thoughts on the East/West divide in his GDC keynote. We don't think he's saying we're not creative.

"When I have my opinion and the team is against it, I think it's important to think about how the producer will react."

Game designer Suda 51 says that producers can think objectively about games. We remember when they were the villains.

"Being owned by Microsoft, we're encouraged to file patents. It makes everyone in the team feel really proud."

Peter Molyneux defends his company stance when questioned in his GDC keynote. Not a winning argument, though.

"Promotion has to be taken into account from the genesis of any game. Creators have to think about marketing."

Akihiro Hino, president of Level 5 – with whom Develop officially has a bromance – reveals how to create hits like Professor Layton.

COMMENT: BUSINESS

Funds and Games – the real cost of the recession

by Nick Gibson, Games Investor Consulting

The games industry's historic resilience to recession and its apparent imperviousness to the current turmoil in the financial market have been debated far and wide. Most commentators have pointed to the remarkable growth experienced in the games retail markets in 2008 as evidence of the industry's Herculean strength and studied indifference to its dire macroeconomic context. The unprecedented depth and scale of this downturn hasn't put most commentators off their rosy-eyed futurology, but there is one impact of the downturn that has been overlooked, and which could prove disastrous for the industry should it continue or worsen.

Put simply, in the last four or five months there has been a collapse in venture capital and, more broadly, private equity funding for privately-held games companies. And I deliberately use the word collapse. Private funding for games companies worldwide since the start of 2009 is tracking down a staggering 60 per cent on last year and close to 70 per cent on the year before that. Combine this with the strong allergic reaction banks are currently exhibiting to the idea of lending to most small and medium sized companies, let alone hit-driven ones, and one could conclude that the once-plentiful wellspring of non-trade finance for privately owned games companies is rapidly drying up.

The bullish industry insider may be thinking that the relative success of games would act as a beacon to attract investors and lenders, but this is not proving to be the case. There are a variety of complex reasons for this, which I will quickly present here.

'NOT IN OUR INDUSTRY, SURELY?'

Most investors will have less capital to invest than they did a year or two years ago, as their own sources of finance will have contracted with the plummeting global stock markets. Many will be spending a higher than expected proportion of their available capital on ensuring their existing investments stay afloat. With the stock markets in such appalling shape, the exit options for their investments will have been curtailed and exacerbated by the fact that the games M&A market has shrunk dramatically too – but that's a whole different article. They will also have become incredibly risk-averse, making new investments within their comfort zone only. Given that few investors really understand the games sector, and so many distrust it, this will have left few investors willing or able to take a punt on a privately-held games company.

The problems with this situation are manifold. Since the start of the millennium, over $4bn has been invested in privately owned games companies. This investment has enabled hundreds of mostly small and medium sized businesses to launch, attract high quality staff and commercial partners, accelerate their growth and, in some cases, generate substantial returns on exit. It has resulted in employment for thousands of games industry workers each year.

> ***"In the last four or five months there has been a collapse in venture capital and private equity funding for privately-held games companies."***

Most importantly, however, this investment has inspired and enabled the sort of innovation that trade finance – i.e. the big publishers – would never even consider backing. Over 60 per cent of that $4bn has gone into network games ventures, mainly online gaming, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the rapid growth and diversification of, and innovation within, the network games market has been underpinned by this external finance. Companies such as Turbine, Mythic, Wild Tangent, Nineyou, Oberon Media, Sulake and CCP Games would not be where they are today without venture capital money.

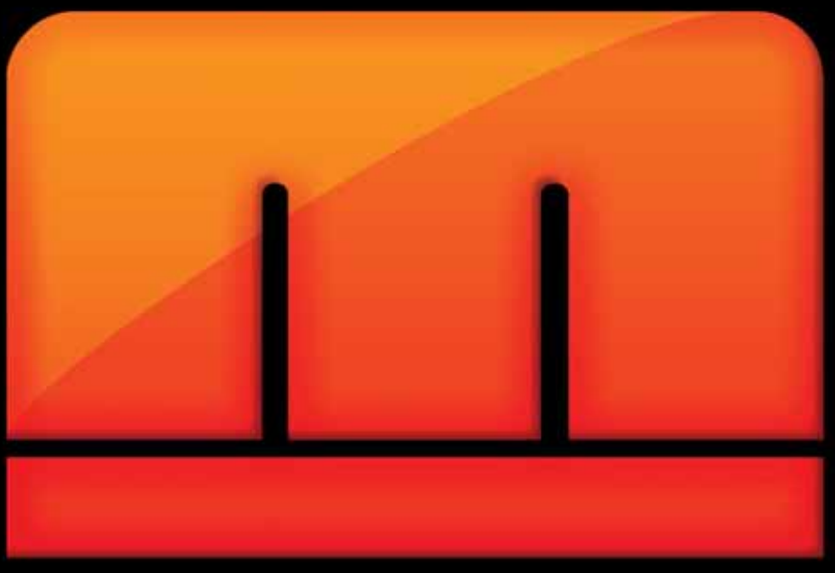
The danger is therefore that, should the drought continue or worsen, not only will we see the collapse of lots of smaller, unprofitable games companies still in their critical development and investment phase, but there will be considerably fewer start-ups able to pick up the innovation baton and continue to evolve the market. In some ways this may well not be an entirely negative outcome. The bursting of the dotcom bubble at the start of the decade forced a radical rethink of online gaming business models and a Darwinian consolidation of the development market that left only the most commercially able-bodied businesses standing.

Developers and games start-ups are facing a landscape lacking in cash rich investors

There have arguably been signs of this bubble reforming in the second half of this decade with MMOs and virtual world companies the focus of investor over-exuberance, whilst mobile gaming has already experienced its investment boom and bust-precipitated consolidation cycle. However, unlike in the late 1990s, the MMO and virtual world markets can actually boast sustainable business models, so the fallout should theoretically be less severe.

So, for those of you who are VC-backed and still loss-making, I would be urgently focusing on the route to positive operational cash flow as the next cash injection may well be a long way off. For those seeking investment, the doors are not closed completely, but finding the right door may prove a challenge.

Nick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries.
www.gamesinvestor.com



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COMMENT: INDUSTRY

In praise of the triple-A behemoth

by Owain Bennallack

You might think it was naivety that had many claiming games were immune to the economic slowdown. Yet I suspect the opposite: an over-confidence born of previous recessions, which ignored how the games industry has grown and the vulnerabilities that entails.

You can't have your cake and eat it, as my grandmother used to say through mouthfuls of Victoria sponge. By going mass-market – by putting a PlayStation under every other telly and *Tetris* on every mobile phone – games have spread far beyond teenage males and kids.

The downside is that we're now susceptible to the vicissitudes of that wider consumer economy. Equally, by becoming attractive to investors and growing (or surviving) on the back of cheap debt, certain firms have been exposed by the withdrawal of such financing in the past 18 months.

2008 was a record one for games industry revenues – over $30 billion for packaged retail games according to Screen Digest – but 2009 won't be. And besides, with ever-bigger production and marketing costs, margins are all important.

I'm sure just as many young males are trying to get hold of *Resident Evil 5* as hunted down the PlayStation original, but the margins are fattened by the masses, for whom games are just another entertainment choice. Without them, we'd be back to the spreadsheets of the mid '90s.

BIG IDEALS

Some commentators relish the onset of such austerity – polygon rationing, re-use for victory, and careless talk in the negotiating room costing if not lives then missed targets and blown budgets.

I alluded here to the few benefits of a Great Depression several issues ago; chiefly, a refocus on cheaper innovation at the expense of lazy bloatware, and an acceleration of the disruption of the value chain, potentially clawing back revenues from retail and publishing.

But going further to halt the upward march of high-end video games would be an anti-climax. While we all get frustrated with credulous publishers telling us their next five clearly mediocre titles are all going to remake the medium, a Cretaceous-Tertiary style extinction event would be an extreme and counterproductive way to encourage new entrants. Morever, we need the expensive and faintly ridiculous big beasts of the gaming ecosystem to uproot further innovation.

True, the post-Atari slump of the 1980s cleared the way for a vast wave of start-ups in the 8-bit boom. But the Japanese also picked up the bat after Atari fell, with Nintendo continuing to drive forward game technology while the West re-gathered its strength. This time we're all in it together.

Also, what would a world dominated by low-budget, easily distributed games look like? Potentially like the morass of Flash games today, or the already swamped iPhone roster.

> ***"Most of what made games exciting in the past two decades needs bigger budgets and a market capable of paying for those creations."***

WAITING FOR CITIZEN GAME

The danger now is that publishing executives en masse lose what nerve they have and reign in not just cost but ambition. Because most of what made games exciting in the past two decades needs ever bigger development budgets and a market capable of supporting and paying for such out-sized creations. And that journey isn't done yet.

Since Atari (and with a few honourable exceptions), cutting-edge innovation has generally meant not new ways to flip red tiles to blue, but rather immersing players into a more amazing world, whether in *Elite*, *Gran Turismo* or *World of Warcraft*. Better middleware and leaner teams will play a part, but the spiritual successor to Nico's adventures in Liberty City won't be realised by two programmers monetising their game through Google Adsense. Making the *Fallout 3* or *Fable 2* of 2020 will require an inconceivable budget, and a business model that funnels money towards it.

Big budget epics like Fallout 3 are required to maintain our industry's momentum towards innovation

Yes, we can hope publishers get smarter about prototyping and financing games, and developers can do more to work efficiently. And excessive marketing costs and me-too release schedules will never be anything but a waste of time and creative effort. But give up on the big blockbusters, as some seem to be suggesting, and we'll follow the footsteps not of Hollywood but of the boardgame industry, becoming an entertaining and frivolous diversion, rather than a fully-emerged artform.

So the next time you see a publisher canning a triple-A development team or saying it's going to refocus on casual play, wince a little. Too much of that, and our industry goes with it.

Owain Bennallack is executive editor of *Develop*. He edited the magazine from its launch until its February 2006 issue. He has also worked at *MCV* and *Edge*, and has provided consultancy and evaluation services to several leading developers and publishers. He is also chairman of the Develop Conference advisory board.

COMMENT: DESIGN

What's the story?

by Billy Thomson, Ruffian Games

The need for a storyline in any game can generally create heated debate among designers. Some swear by the need for an informative and compelling storyline, while others completely disregard the need for any form of narrative at all, falling back on the argument that if it plays well enough you don't need to hide behind a plot heavy story.

Personally I see both arguments as perfectly reasonable; I know, splinters in my arse. The way I see it, the genre of game has a massive influence on the need for story. Puzzle, racing, fighting, sports games and countless others have no need at all for a story, and these genres have some of the most incredibly addictive, fun and commercially successful games created to date. To see the proof of this all you have to do is look at games like *Tetris*, *Mario Kart* – SNES or DS – *Gran Turismo*, *Street Fighter*, *Pro Evo*, *Madden*; the list goes on and on.

So it's clear that you don't necessarily need an engaging story to have a fantastic gaming experience, albeit in certain gaming genres. Despite that knowledge, I do believe that some other genres are entirely dependent on a well written, structured and paced storyline, and if delivered in the right way can turn a good game into a truly great game.

For the rest of this article I'll talk about how today's games convey the story in different ways, listing the more popular methods they tend to use. I'll also explain why I think some are more effective than others, and why one in particular has almost made me throw a controller through the screen of my TV.

VOICE-OVER

Using a voice-over to deliver your story is one of the easiest, yet least effective methods you can use. Trust me, I know this from bitter experience. It seems to me that the reason it's not as effective as the others listed is the fact that there's nothing visual to tie the information to, making it harder for people to stay focused and retain the information provided. I'm a firm believer that voice-over has an important part to play in games, but I believe that role is more in the realms of game direction as opposed to conveying the game's storyline. A theory I hope to prove in time…

PICKUPS

This method has been used for a long time, and it can work quite well: recently *BioShock* did a decent job and *Dead Space* made it work as well as I've seen. The key here is to never use this method to deliver core information that is required to progress through the game, because some players will inevitably miss it and become lost. While the information provided in pickups is usually secondary to the central storyline, it can and frequently does add depth and flavour to the game world, but it can ultimately never be used for more than that.

> ***"It's clear that you don't necessarily need an engaging story to have a fantastic gaming experience, albeit in certain gaming genres."***

FULL VIDEO CUT SCENES

This has to be the most expensive of all storytelling methods, but if you can get the blend of interesting characters, well written dialogue and skilful camera direction right, it can be so effective that you can actually keep players playing your game even if they're not specifically enjoying playing it!

One of the most commercially successful games of our time has a control system that is entirely broken, yet it has mastered this method to the point that I continue to play just to see where the story will take me.

This mechanic also creates one of my biggest pet hates in games, the unskippable – yes it's a word – cut scene, that has a nightmarishly hard section right after it and a respawn point just before it. Why in the name of *GoW* would anyone do that to the player?

INTERACTIVE CUT SCENES

I think this is the most difficult, yet rewarding, of all story-telling methods. The size of the design and production task is massive due to the fact that you have a fully controllable player character in the middle of the scene, and nine times out of ten they'll be doing everything in their power to break it. I'm not going to attempt to list all of the things that can go wrong and which games have got them wrong because the list is simply too long for this article.

All I will say is no game has even come close to *Half-Life 2* in this area, Valve is simply years ahead of anyone else. Sometimes as a designer all you can do is tip your cap, say well done and try to learn from the guys at the very top of their game.

Half-Life 2 remains one of the best games to blend story and gameplay. When will other games match its benchmark?

Billy Thomson is the creative director of newly-formed developer Ruffian Games. Billy has over 13 years experience of designing video games, including design roles on *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2*, before working as lead designer on Realtime Worlds' celebrated *Crackdown*.
www.ruffiangames.com

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COMMENT: CODING

Cinematic Realism

by David Jefferies, Black Rock Studio

A film is instantly recognisable. You can immediately tell the difference between a summer blockbuster and a TV documentary, and you're never going to mistake a scene from *Gone In 60 Seconds* for an outside broadcast on *South Today*. It's not just the content that's different; it's the whole look of the film that makes it unmistakably cinematic.

The art direction of our game – the recently announced *Split/Second* – is cinematic realism. We don't want our game to be a movie, but we want to use the tricks of cinema so that it feels cinematic. We want it to look like it has high production values. Think *Transformers* rather than *Panorama*.

So what is it that film makers do to their summer blockbusters to make them so unmistakable? One of the first things to note is that viewers expect film to exhibit certain characteristics, and those expectations were formed in the movie heyday of the 1940s and 1950s.

Firstly, they expect the film to run at 24fps, with heavy motion blur making up for the slow speed. These days there is no technical reason why films must run at 24fps – with modern digital film cameras it would be possible to have films run at 60 or even 100fps, which would give much greater visual fidelity and would require much less motion blur.

However, viewers associate the slow shutter speed and motion blur with films, and they associate films with high production values. Not that I'm advocating slow frame rates here – it's good motion blur that is important.

Another artefact of earlier film making technology is the vignette. This is the darkening down and loss of saturation of the film at the corners of the screen. Old multiple element lenses caused this, where the rear lenses got shaded by the front lenses. Again, this isn't a problem with modern machinery, but it's one of the cues we all use to differentiate film from TV, and so modern films artificially apply it as a post process.

It's also important to simulate when an old fashioned lens would flare and bloom. Modern lenses are built to more exacting specifications than older lenses, and so have fewer of the imperfections that cause bloom and flare. Again, though, there is an association that needs to be maintained if the product is to thought of as having high production values. After all, *Lawrence of Arabia* would hardly be the same without the sun effects.

Of course, developers have tried putting crude lens flare effects in their game since the '90s, but only recently are we starting to see some convincing examples of internal reflection in the lens.

But by far the most important difference between movie and cheap TV is colour correction. Originally colour correction was used to compensate for variations in the lighting conditions and white balance of the film to achieve colour continuity. But these days it's increasingly used to establish a desired look and to set a mood. It's this modern usage of digital colour correction (increasingly called colour enhancement to reflect it's current usage) that we're interested in, and that sets films like *Transformers* apart from TV and games. It's this that brings a boring outdoor scene to life and makes it look like a movie.

> ***Colour correction is important to any production – it brings a boring outdoor scene to life and makes it look like a striking movie scene.***

We use a colour correction technique described in GPU Gems that involves an artist bringing a screenshot of the game into Photoshop and treating it until they get the desired look. Because we know there exists a one-to-one mapping between the input colour and output colour we can represent the conversion as a 1D texture. Essentially it's a palette that we use in-game during the tone-mapping phase to convert each pixel to achieve the look we're after. We also blend between these textures to change the look at different points in the game, for example, a crash state will convey a different mood to a winning state.

Split/Second is embracing 'cinematic realism' with new rendering techniques. For more about the game's production, turn to page 30

We take post-processing seriously and, as I described in last month's column, we spend 50 per cent of our render time in that phase. A lot of our post-processing is down to our deferred shading system, but the techniques described above can be equally achieved with a forward renderer. Having said that, if you've got a deferred shader then per- pixel motion blur becomes somewhat easier because it already manages the multiple render targets for you.

Of course, this isn't the whole story; the lighting, camera work and animation play an equally important role in conveying the production values of the game, and I'll go into more details on these in a future column. But this is a good start to making your game more Nicolas Cage than Fred Dinenage.

David Jefferies started in the industry at Psygnosis in Liverpool in 1995, eventually working on *Global Domination* and *WipEout 3*. He later moved to Rare where he worked on the *Perfect Dark* and *Donkey Kong* franchises. Next came a move down to Brighton to join Black Rock Studio (which was then known as Climax Racing) in 2003. On this generation of consoles he's been the technical director of *MotoGP'06* and *MotoGP'07* before starting work on new racer *Split/Second*.
www.blackrockstudio.com

GDC 09 in pictures

17,000 flocked to San Francisco last month for the five days of the Game Developers Conference and over 500 sessions and speeches. **Michael French** runs through some of the highlights. Over 80 news stories detailing all the key announcements can be found at www.developmag.com…

◀ **MONDAY, MARCH 23rd**
iPhone was every where at GDC. 'Spiritual first party' Ngmoco presented GDC Mobile's opening keynote. Founder Neil Young (formerly of EA LA) detailed exactly why the iPhone 'changed everything', including the observation that "Apple have trained 30m people to download and and install applications on their phone where ever they are. It is an amazing process we are witnessing." It's hard to argue with him.

▲ **MONDAY, MARCH 23rd**
Straight after Young, a very different mobile project was announced. Qualcomm's Mike Yuen debuted what he calls the industry's 'fourth console' – a Wii-sized console for emerging markets built on smartphone technology, using BREW and 3G for distribution of back-catalogue classics from the likes of Activision, Capcom and PopCap. It's no pipedream either: it launches in Brazil this month.

▲ **TUESDAY, MARCH 24th**
On the other side of town, VentureBeat hosted an 'anti-GDC' if you will: GamesBeat was a targeted one-day conference featuring panel discussions packed with the kinds of people who would usually be keynoting other events. For instance: Neil Young cropped up again here (*second from left*), along with reps from other platforms N-Gage, Facebook, PSN and MySpace (*from left to right: Greg Sauter, Gareth Davies, Susan Panico and Jason Oberfest respectively*). It was a highlight of the day (*along with Seamus Blackley's talk later – see page 8*), in which Young dressed down Sony and Nokia for the flaws in their formats versus Apple's.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25th
Leave it to *Develop* to inject a dash of glamour to the week's proceedings. Our girls handed out useful bags to attendees during the morning of the Wednesday and the Thursday - perfect for expo swag and, more importantly, for carrying around the bundled copy of the latest issue of *Develop*.

WANT MORE GDC?
DEVELOP WAS ON HAND ALL WEEK, REPORTING ON THE KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS. READ MORE AT WWW.DEVELOPMAG.COM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25th
Nintendo president Satoru Iwata took to the stage for the opening keynote of the main conference. His wide ranging speech took in Wii's 50m global ship figure, the dominance of the balance board, a new *Zelda* for DS, DSi Ware – and he even gave all attendees a free copy of *Rhythm Paradise*. He even reiterated Nintendo's view that third party studios can succeed on its platforms despite the format-holder's power as a development house too. But with only a few examples to back that claim up, the jury's still out on that part of the message. We weren't that taken with his leather blazer, either.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26th
Another Japanese keynote, another leather blazer. *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima was the Thursday lead speaker, offering up a look at the making of his iconic stealth series. Self-deprecating jabs at his penchant for long cut-scenes fell a bit flat – no wonder when he, true to form, took up a slot longer than the usual GDC session time at 90 minutes. But the key message was his humble closure pointing to innovations in the West as inspiring his next games. More on that in our exclusive interview with the man himself next month.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27th
Fallout 3 designer Emil Pagliarulo keynoted the last day, explaining to younger attendees how he got into the industry. Pagliarulo spoke at other parts of the conference, too, and was most illuminating during a panel discussion with *Ico* creator Fumito Ueda and *Killer 7* creator Suda 51. Of Bethesda's design methodology he said: "One of our unofficial mottos is 'great games are played, not made' and that means that we play our own games. It's a skill that you have to learn; you have to be brutally honest with yourself."

That difficult second album

Being able to see into the future would be a useful skill for any business given the current climate, and GameHorizon Conference is hoping to help European developers do just that when it returns this June, says **Lewis Harrison**…

From Top: Carri Cunliffe, Dave Jones, Rick Gibson, Ian Livingstone, Mark Rein

Following a successful inaugural event last summer, which saw around 300 senior games execs gather in Newcastle to hear from speakers including Microsoft's Chris Satchell and Eidos's Julien Merceron, the GameHorizon conference will return on 23rd to 24th June at The Sage, Gateshead on the banks of the River Tyne.

Organised by North East-based Codeworks GameHorizon – a business network for UK-based games companies – the conference takes a broad look at the business and future of games and is aiming to offer something a little different in an already-overcrowded events calendar.

"The first GameHorizon Conference attracted hundreds of games executives from around Europe, so it was really an easy decision to run the event once again," said Carri Cunliffe, director of the conference and head of sector development at GameHorizon.

"There were plenty of conferences and expos that look in-depth at the details of, for example, games art and programming, but we felt there was a gap in the market for an event which focused on higher level business issues, emerging technologies and various future opportunities."

With several months still to go until the conference, GameHorizon says it has already been able to attract the right calibre of speakers it believes will be able to deliver on the promise of offering delegates a glimpse into the future.

Industry legend David Jones, creative director and CEO of Realtime Worlds, will deliver the opening speech on the first morning of the two-day event. The man behind gaming classics *Grand Theft Auto* and *Lemmings* says he was pleased to get involved with the event following the feedback of colleagues at Realtime last year.

"The GameHorizon Conference is an increasingly important event on the calendar," stated Jones. "Although this will be my first year of attending, the reports back from the RTW staff who've gone in the past is that it's a very interesting and informative event with a high calibre of attendees. All of which I'm very much looking forward to seeing for myself."

Joining Jones in the line-up will be Epic Games' outspoken vice president Mark Rein, *Develop* columnist and director of games industry market intelligence firm Games Investor Consulting Rick Gibson, and Eidos' creative director Ian Livingstone, who returns as host for the two-day event.

"By keeping the GameHorizon Conference relatively small we're able to give delegates access to people they need to meet for their business."

Said Cunliffe: "Dave Jones, Mark and Rick are exactly the type of people we want to attract. Between them, Dave and Mark have been responsible for some of the most groundbreaking and commercially successful games of recent years in *Crackdown* and *Gears of War*. If anyone has a good understanding of where the opportunities and challenges lie ahead for the industry it's these guys."

In total, 20 speakers will talk at the GameHorizon Conference. Many, such as those above, will be there to reveal insights about where the industry is heading, and about emerging business models and new technologies. But Codeworks GameHorizon is also bringing in several speakers from outside the industry, which Cunliffe says will add an extra dimension to the programme.

"One of the things we wanted to achieve with this event was to bring in new insights, ideas and inspiration from outside the gaming world. In the past I think that our industry has been guilty of being a little too insular and not learning from other entertainment mediums – or even other, seemingly unrelated industries.

"So at the conference we're bringing in a number of more, I guess you could call, unconventional speakers. For example we have Steve Clayton, a senior technologist at Microsoft who works on some pretty jaw-dropping technologies with partners throughout the UK and US. At the conference he'll be giving first looks at some of the best new technologies they're working on that could be of use to our industry. It's a real coup to have him along.

"As well as Steve we also have Richard St John, who was one of the highest-rated speakers at the legendary TED conference in the US recently. Having turned his own marketing company into a multimillion dollar success story, he went on to interview 500 of the world's most successful people – everyone from Dan Ackroyd and Muhammad Ali to Jerry Seinfeld and Jogi Berra – and identified the traits needed to become a success. He's a fascinating guy and his talk is an inspiration."

With its line-up of speakers taking shape, Codeworks GameHorizon is confident it will prove popular. Despite this, Cunliffe says they currently have no plans to make it a larger scale event.

"One of the biggest reasons people attend conferences, besides the speakers, is for the networking. But if there are thousands of people in a room, you're going to struggle to find the ones you really need to talk to. By keeping the GameHorizon Conference relatively small, we're able to give delegates access to people they need to meet for their business – plus it allows us to establish more of a community feel, which we hope makes the event a lot more fun to be at."

www.gamehorizonconference.com

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Great Speakers

KEYNOTE

David Jones – creator of Lemmings and Grand Theft Auto, and founder of Realtime Worlds is giving a keynote.

Just announced:

Infectious: How Viral Games Capture an Audience of Millions
Jeff Coghlan, Matmi

Production Postmortem: Dead to Rights – Redemption: Hunting Sparrows with a Cannon
Imre Jele, Blitz Games

Race Script: An Alternative to Rubber Banding
Eduardo Jimenez Chapresto, Disney Black Rock Studio

Case Study: A Browser-based MMORG on Every Desktop
Jim McNiven, Kerb

Other speakers confirmed so far include:

Climax • Glu Mobile • Google • Media Molecule • MySpace, Nokia • Playfish • Pocket Gamer • Sony Computer Entertainment • Team 17

Inspiring Sessions

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> **Kristian Segerstrale, CEO, Playfish**

evolve

New for 2009

It takes place on Tuesday 14 July as a one day event with three tracks and then as a new track within the main programme on the Wednesday. Evolve will focus on developing games for new platforms including mobile devices, iPhone and XBLA, new technologies and new markets like social and casual gaming.

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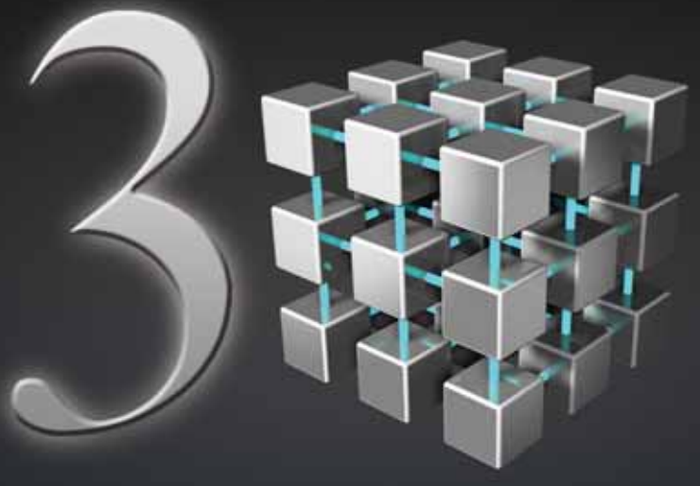
The gaming industry doesn't have to be a puzzle



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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

"Looking outside of the racing genre has inspired us to invest in new areas..."
Black Rock's Nick Baynes, p30

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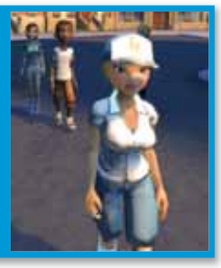

Want one of these?

The Develop Awards return for 2009 to celebrate the best of British and European games development. Think you deserve a nod? Find out more on p24

How to win a Develop Award

In three months' time, the cream of European games development will once again descend on Brighton to see the best of the best honoured at the 2009 Develop Awards. But how can you make sure you are in the running to win one? **Michael French** runs through the criteria for each award…

CREATIVITY

BEST NEW IP

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio-made IP that has introduced a new wholly originaly property to games consoles, portable devices or home computer games platforms in the past year.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: *Lost Winds* (Frontier Developments)

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: *MotorStorm* (Evolution/SCEE)
2006: Console IP - *Buzz!* (Relentless/Sony External Development) PC IP – *Fahrenheit* (Quantic Dream)
2005: *Far Cry* (Crytek)

BEST USE OF A LICENCE OR IP

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio that has introduced a quality game, regardless of platform, based on an external property it does not own or did not create – licensed or otherwise – in the past year.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: *Lego Indiana Jones* (Traveller's Tales)

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: *Lego Star Wars II* (Traveller's Tales)
2006: *King Kong* (Ubisoft France)
2005: *Lego Star Wars* (Traveller's Tales)

VISUAL ARTS

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio that has demonstrated impressive graphical and design work in the games or gaming content it has produced and released during the past year.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Rockstar North (*Grand Theft Auto IV*)

PREVIOUS WINNERS (BEST ART & AUDIO)
2007: Rare (*Viva Piñata*)

AUDIO ACCOMPLISHMENT

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio, or company working in the audio space, that has shown pitch-perfect audio design and sound production skills in its output during the past year. Use of licensed and original tracks will also be taken into account.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Rockstar North (*Grand Theft Auto IV*)

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: FreeStyle (*B-Boy*)

PUBLISHING HERO

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any games publisher or platform-holder from any country, including outside Europe, that has supported the UK and European games development industry during the past year via the publishing, co-development and/or funding of new games.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Nintendo

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Sega
2006: SCEE
2005: SCi
2004: Microsoft

TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES

TECHNICAL INNOVATION

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio or company that has demonstrated impressive technical innovation in any field including – but not limited to – online, user-generated content or graphics in its recent releases.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: NaturalMotion/Image Metrics (*GTA IV*)

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Realtime Worlds *(Crackdown)*
2006: Relentless/Sony External Developments *(Buzz!)*
2005: Morpheme *(Bluetooth Biplanes)*
2004: SCEE (EyeToy/*SingStar*)

BEST TOOLS PROVIDER

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any company, of any nationality, that has released middleware or tools enhancing or supporting the work of UK or European games development teams. Extra weight is given to new or significant version upgrades.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Epic Games

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Havok
2006: NaturalMotion
2005: Havok
2004: Criterion

CREATIVE OUTSOURCING

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Returning for its second year, this award acknowledges businesses or contractors who have helped inform the creative side of a studio's work in areas such as audio, art or writing.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Richard Jacques Studio

SERVICES

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European company that provides core games services or functions supporting the world's games developers in fields such as testing, localisation, quality assurance, motion capture and the like.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Babel Media

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Babel Media
2006: Side UK
2005: Babel Media
2004: Audiomotion

RECRUITMENT COMPANY

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European company working in the field of recruitment and human resources that has successfully served the needs and demands of the European development community during the last 12 months.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: OPM

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Datascope
2006: OPM
2005: Datascope
2004: Aardvark Swift

STUDIOS

BEST NEW STUDIO

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any new UK or European studio which has had its first game commercially released – either via retail or digital distribution – during the eligibility period. Companies don't need to have been founded during that period, however.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Doublesix

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Realtime Worlds
2006: BigBig
2005: Juice Games
2004: Swordfish Studios

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European studio that has, in the last 12 months, improved its business as proven by acquisitions, investments and/or steps to improve its output, efficiency or the company's commercial performance.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Realtime Worlds

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Blitz

BEST HANDHELD GAMES STUDIO

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European games development company creating and/or producing games for mobile devices and/or handheld games platforms, such as iPhone or Nintendo DS. Lobbying studios should have had some significant output in the last 12 months.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Idealworks 3D

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Rockstar Leeds
2006: Gameloft
2005: Morpheme
2004: IOMO

BEST INDEPENDENT STUDIO

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European games development company, which is not owned or managed by a publisher, working on any available game platform. Lobbying studios should have had some significant output in the last 12 months.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Splash Damage

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Traveller's Tales
2006: Traveller's Tales
2005: Traveller's Tales
2004: Crytek

BEST IN-HOUSE STUDIO

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
Any UK or European publisher-owned games development company or in-house games development resource – including those acquired recently – working on any currently available game platform with game(s) released in the past year.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Rockstar North

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Ubisoft France
2006: Criterion
2005: Rockstar North
2004: Ubisoft France

INDUSTRY RECOGNITION

DEVELOPMENT LEGEND

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
After a year off in 2008, this award returns for 2009. The winner, chosen by *Develop*, is an individual who has made a significant impact on games development – in a commercial, creative or technological sense – during their lifetime.

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Ian Hetherington

OTHER PREVIOUS WINNERS
2006: Charles Cecil
2005: David Braben
2004: Peter Molyneux

GRAND PRIX

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?
This is a special award from *Develop*, bestowed upon a European individual or company in recognition of outstanding achievements in games over the past 12 months. The candidate is decided after soundings from the industry.

LAST YEAR'S WINNER
2008: Rockstar Games

PREVIOUS WINNERS
2007: Sony Computer Entertainment
2006: Bizarre Creations
2005: Creative Assembly
2004: Sony London Studios

Awards FAQ

WHEN ARE THE AWARDS?
Wednesday, July 15th, 2009 at the Hilton Brighton Metropole.

HOW CAN MY COMPANY ENTER?
Simple. Send a short pitch as a Word document to Develop's editor-in-chief at Michael.French@intentmedia.co.uk
Give us a bit of history and highlight your company's key achievements – and tell us what awards you want to be considered for. But don't go into masses of detail. We know the industry well – and have probably heard of you.

WHAT'S THE ELIGIBILITY PERIOD?
For those awards criteria based on released products, please note that to be eligible titles must have been released somewhere in the world by July 15th.

WHEN IS THE DEADLINE?
May 13th

WHAT'S THE JUDGING PROCESS?
When the nominations are all in, they are appraised by the *Develop* editorial team. The team then decides upon a shortlist for each award.

Profiles of the shortlisted companies are then sent out (as a PDF) to a judging panel of 100 industry executives chosen by the magazine team. The judges then confidentially disclose their choices. Those with the most votes win.

HOW MUCH IS IT TO ATTEND?
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£199 + VAT – Individual seats
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Best Use of a Licence or IP
Visual Arts
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Split Personality

Disney's UK studio Black Rock proved its worth with last year's new racing IP Pure – but now it wants to muscle in on the street racer category with action-driving game Split/Second. And, **Michael French** discovers, the team says it has created a game with more character and innovation than anything else in the Britsoft driving game scene's recent history…

"We're trying something different, and are rejecting a lot of the things expected of a racing game."

Nick Baynes, Game Director

If there's one undisputable thing about UK games developers, is that they are very good at racing games. Sure, excellent work is done by Polyphony, Turn 10 and Black Box overseas, but they are outnumbered by Codemasters, Criterion, Blimey, Evolution, Sony Liverpool, BigBig, Eutechnyx, Ubisoft Reflections, Bizarre Creations, Midway Newcastle – and, of course, Disney's Black Rock Studio.

Next year sees the studio release its second title, *Split/Second*. But the game is very different from the usual racing fare that UK developers are so good at. Yes, there are unlicensed muscle cars and a power bar mechanic, like *Burnout*. There's a tightly honed arcade-meets-sim edge to the racing, as seen in *Race Driver GRID*. And like Black Rock's debut game *Pure* it shows an exuberance in both visuals and sound.

Yet the key for *Split/Second* isn't just racing, but the environments you race through. In a bid to capture Hollywood pyrotechnics, the game is set in a television series, with all the courses acting as giant soundstages. Most importantly, "the courses are changing while you are racing," says director Nick Baynes – but the changes are driven by the player.

Clockwise from bottom left: audio director Steve Rockett, technical director David Jefferies, game director Nick Baynes, art director Steve Uphill and studio head Tony Beckwith

USER-GENERATED DISCONTENT

The pitch runs like this: as a racer in a high-stakes reality TV show, you're competing with other drivers in urban street races, with drifts and clever manoeuvring filling up a power bar. So far, so *Need for Speed*. But this is not spent on nitrous, but 'powerplays', on-screen destructive events. Throughout the tracks are environmental objects and explosive effects of varying size that can be activated once drivers have racked up the requisite power – deploy them at the right moment, and you can take out the cars ahead of you or coming up from the rear. Powerplays range from the small-scale, such as an exploding bus, through to a collapsible airport radar tower which splits in two, crumbles to the floor and diverts traffic onto a runaway – right up to the more audacious, such as a plane falling from the sky and crashing on said runway.

It's a mix of cartoon-style, hyper-real and glossy mayhem designed to make players pay attention to the world they are travelling through rather than just where they are speeding to. And that's the point.

"It's classic car chases with vehicles flying through glass windows and smashing through buildings – we don't want this to be like every other racer with cars bolted to the ground like Scalectrix. We want gamers to think every other driving game is boring after playing *Split/Second*," says Baynes.

Hyperbole? Sure, with the game only just revealed after a carefully orchestrated tease by Disney's PR, the team is excited to talk. But tour the Brighton studio to survey the work that is going into *Split/Second*, and it's clear that after *Pure* this game is no sophomore slump, no 'difficult Second album'. And, most importantly, it is designed to set the studio apart from the ten other UK studios famed for racing games – and is backed with the technology and style to realise that aim.

WORLD'S BLOWN APART

Gameplay wise, the idea has been fine-tuned to place emphasis on the environments as something to remember, rather than memorable for their shortcuts.

"With almost every racing game the tracks you experience when you first buy the game are the same no matter if you play them during the first hour or the 20th hour. You might have a faster car – but it's the same environment. In *Split/Second* as you unlock more powerplays there is more depth to the courses and more variety when you revisit them," says Baynes. Likewise the game opens up similarly in line with player performance, he adds, pointing out that as drivers get better, they'll unlock powerplays quicker – directly binding the addition of new track elements to competency and gameplay.

"That also lets us approach racing from a fresh view – instead of a career mode in a racer, which just forces you to revisit old tracks with better opponents, here we give players environments that have the potential to be totally different after a few hours' play."

And while all the powerplays are essentially unlockable scripted events of various magnitude, it's still a stark contrast to the structure of other racers, which the Black Rock team think will be characterised as lifeless once *Split/Second* is released next year. They don't say it outright, but the team clearly want spectators to think days are numbered for UK-made rivals like *GRID*, *DIRT*, *Burnout* – and now even *Need for Speed*, whose sim spin-off is being made in London.

PLAYABLE DEMON

So how is the Brighton studio realising what is a high-concept racer? The core gameplay idea has been devised (but still open to tweaking – Baynes and the team admit that there's still at least eight months of work to be done on the game overall, specifically areas like AI and juggling the fairness of powerplays triggered by NPCs). Which leaves

the heavy lifting is being done to the art and code teams. To maintain the action-driven energy, the team has been looking outside of racing to inform their decisions. Ask what the inspirations are, and you'll be given examples like Michael Bay films such as *Transformers* and Stallone's TV show *The Contender* rather than *Midnight Club* or *Stuntman*.

"Looking outside of the racing genre has been crucial for this – its inspired us to invest in different areas, new technology and better approaches to audio," says Baynes.

From an artistic sense, the emphasis has been taken off the cars, and put into 'hyper realism' for those destructible environments. Mood boards in art director Steve Uphill's visual style guide are packed with grabs from gritty action movies with glossy visuals.

"The fact is, reality is boring – that's not what we want to create visually," says Uphill. "The key for any video game should be to take you to somewhere unreal, not somewhere that is drab like the real world."

Visually, the game is trying to convey "something beyond what you're seeing on screen," adds Baynes.

Technical director David Jefferies' work on deferred rendering (regularly chronicled in his monthly *Develop* column) has aided this approach. Explains Jefferies: "It's been a big part of the tools we have been developing to give artists the power to create striking environments you wouldn't see elsewhere."

He adds that Black Rock's technology allows for not just for creating vibrant environments, but dynamic ones: the intention is for the colour grading to change if you're winning or losing, at which point the music will also kick up the tempo as you head towards the finish line. "Everything is being geared towards conveying a sense of achievement and excitement in the player during the intense moments – it's something that a lot of action games do really well, but no racing game has tried to capture.

Baynes later confesses that the tension of *Metal Gear Solid* is more relevant to *Split/Second* than any obvious Hollywood reference point like *The Fast and the Furious*: "The end of race need to feel like the high point of a movie, when the protagonist faces off against an enemy."

Again, the intention is to draw on genres that usually aren't applied to racing games, hence why the team describe their signature style as 'cinematic realism'. Furthermore, that deferred rendering system allows for multiple light sources, and helps capture that filmic feel.

> ***"The fact is, reality is boring. The key for any video game should be to take you to places that are unreal."***
>
> *Steve Uphill, Art Director*

Says Uphill: "It's what film does as well – they light a single scene to make viewers buy into what is essentially a very unreal scene."

To show that technology off, the game also promises a mix of outside environments, but plenty of interiors too (Uphill reckons it's about a 60/40 split). Adds Jefferies: "This plays to our strengths and the engine. The renderer can let us make and light those environments really quickly – and also you don't see those kind of environments in a racing game. The most you get 'inside' is usually a tunnel connecting two open spaces. That in turn creates a great way to play with lighting, with different effects for inside and outside, and ultimately means we can generate a different emotion – a closed darker space, along with a change in music, would make the player feel very different to just whizzing around a track."

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

There's also plenty of other ambitious tech elements too – the team want to use volumetric smoke, but not just as a means to wow the player visually or for when buildings collapse; they want to turn it into a strategic gameplay device.

"Cars could punch through the smoke, and you'll see them burst through exhaust clouds or dust – it creates a dramatic visual effect, but has gameplay implications too," say Jefferies. "Smoke obscures your vision, so if you're in the lead it might not be the best idea to race ahead; you might want to let another racers speed ahead and cut a line of visibility through the smoke for you."

The game's audio production takes a cue from Hollywood, too, and is also set about creating realism using unrealistic effects.

Explains Baynes: "We're looking at how we can get sound effects that don't in theory match what you are seeing on screen, but represent what we want and mixing them with real sound effects."

So in *Split/Second* the growl of a muscle car engine isn't just the usual sample of a real vehicle with the foot on the gas, but a lion's roar underpinned with the ticking of a motor – the noise of cars rushing past each other is in fact bullets whizzing past microphones.

"It's important that we capture that Hollywood feel – if something explodes on screen in a cinema, you'll have something fly over head and all sorts of completely unrealistic effects – but no one cares if it's not realistic, they just want pure excitement," adds Baynes. "Hopefully in surround sound that approach will make *Split/Second* a pretty unique experience."

In terms of generating those effects in response to player actions, Black Rock is ditching cross-fade effects for a more granular approach to audio design.

"That means we can really control the effects," explains audio director Steve Rockett. One demo shows individual engine noises that are chopped into grains and played on loop, its speed varying according to how heavily the player squeezes the trigger – it's not just an audio FX sped up or slowed down. Adds Rockett: "It just feels much more realistic and responsive."

The same approach is applied to the music. In another move to dispense with the staples of racing through urban landscapes, there will be no licensed tracks in *Split/Second*, opting instead for a dynamic soundtrack inspired by movie scores.

"It beats having the generic Green Day or Chemical Brothers track that developers seem to love but which blares over the gameplay with little relation to what's happening on the screen," says Baynes.

"It also gives us a lot more control to what the player experiences – both as a developer and a player," adds Rockett, nodding to yet more non-racing elements: "In terms of the dynamic music, we're inspired by films like *Rocky* or *The Matrix*. Just because we aren't making a war game like *Call of Duty*, doesn't mean we can't look to them for inspiration."

Adds Baynes: "The whole trajectory of the games industry has been towards making games that are 'more real' but developers are too focused on 'reality'. Movies and TV are miles ahead of us in that capacity – they are about making things larger than life, not the same as life. That's what we want to do visually and aurally."

"And that's why things like the lion sound effect blended in works well," continues Rockett. "In *Star Wars* the ridiculous sound effects support the visuals. In *Split/Second* you could play spot the sound effect if you're clever, but for 99 per cent the lion's roar or whatever is subliminal, making an explosion or an engine rev feel uncomfortable."

GEAR CHANGE

In all, the game is a clear reaction to the rest of the racing genre – an entrenched category in need of the innovation, the team says. They are careful not talk down the opposition too much – after all, when the team consists of staff which once upon a time called places like Codemasters or Criterion home before moving to the South, it would be unfair on old friends.

But clearly they do want *Split/Second* to be compared to the other similar games out there, and to show them up for not trying anything new.

That's why the game features almost outlandish ideas like a volumetric-smoke-as-gameplay-device, which Baynes readily admits was just an R&D experiment which the team thought would eventually be dropped. "But we're actually doing these things because the genre needs that kind of fresh innovation."

And the game's clean, HUD-less look – all the info will be shown on the rear bumper of the vehicle – is another example.

"If you look at screenshots of racing games, they all kind of look the same," says Baynes. "It's another example of how we're trying something different, and really want to reject a lot of the things that are established or expected of a racing game."

Adds Uphill: "We want to immerse the player into the environment – something that isn't really done in a lot of other racing games, which tend to force the player to be more technically minded."

Plus, the team says, the established technology base has meant a more fluid exchange and evolution of ideas throughout development, as both technical, art, audio and design staff can collaborate on ideas, he adds: "We're constantly throwing around ideas about the kinds of environments we could render and then destroy."

Adds Jefferies: "It's been a huge transfer of ideas, which is a little different from other productions where the different coding, art and design teams can be ghettoised and ordered to just shut up and get on with it."

It also means that the ideas get more and more outlandish as the team debate them – which has a roundabout effect on the actual tools, says Jefferies.

"You get to a point when you are developing tech that the tools are used by the artists and designers to do things that we never thought of when we developed the technology in the first place. In all there's been a real group effort to keep pushing and try new things."

WHEELY GOOD

Finally, the team adds that it isn't just trying to show off here with its talk of high-end tools powering an equally high-end concept. As a racing studio, Black Rock has a vested interest in making sure the driving game category evolves and continues to excite, hence why the regular talk of taking it in a new direction with *Split/Second*.

"It helps that our inspiration is the big blockbuster movie – it makes the game a massmarket proposition, and is a good hybrid of what someone familiar with *Burnout* or *Need for Speed* might expect but also should please newcomers," says Baynes.

"We're all fans of street racing here, but as a genre it is relatively stale – the evolution is only coming from how you customise cars, which can only serve to remove you from the action – I think *Split/Second* will do the opposite."

And as studio head Tony Beckwith concludes, the genre isn't in as good a health as it once was – and needs something original to fire it up again: "If you look at the sales figures, the racing genre is in many respects dying out – take *Mario Kart* out of the equation and the category is in a dire way. I think this genre is ripe for something new and inventive to give it a kick start."

www.blackrockstudio.com

KEEPING ON TRACK

While *Split/Second*'s inventive concept has fed off a multitude of Hollywood reference points and also Black Rock's proprietary tech, the team has been keen to make sure that the title remains a racing game at heart and that this isn't lost amidst excitement over deferred rendering or exploding bus stops.

So when it comes to track design – a key part of any racer, of course – the design team has been given strict orders to make sure courses and environments stand up, whether the walls are crumbling or not.

Explains game director Nick Baynes: "In a track design sense, the concept has on affected the way we have approached things like visibility on corners – making sure that there are no tall buildings in the way so that players aren't overwhelmed with having to drift and keep an eye on the obstacles or powerplays ahead.

"Ultimately, we haven't let the action element totally control the track design: all the tracks have been designed with the rule that 'if you took powerplays out of the game, you could still enjoy it.'"

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Yorkshire Riffers

It's long been at the heart of UK development, but how will Yorkshire fare in the future? **Ed Fear** sat down with five of the region's studios to see how the community spirit will help them weather the storm…

From left to right: Sefton, Brown, Gay, Amsel and Porter. Clearly their mothers never told them to not put their hands in their pockets.

Yorkshire's had quite a history with games development – where did is start from?

Paul Porter: For Sheffield, Gremlin was a big starting point. It was originally a computer shop called Just Micro, and then they started creating games in the space above the shop. That was really early '80s. A lot of the companies in Sheffield have people have people who worked at either Gremlin or Alligator. Certainly, when Infrogrames took over Gremlin and shut it down, that's when we started Sumo. We've got about 130 staff, but about 100 of those are people who've worked with us before.

Elliot Gay: Leeds is different. There were a number of smaller studios, but there were a lot of people around that were making games and moving around between the companies. So certainly, there's been an interest in developing games in Yorkshire since the very beginning.

> ***"There's been an interest in developing games in Yorkshire since the very beginning – the birth of the bedroom coder, really."***
>
> ***Elliot Gay, GamerHolix***

Jamie Sefton: There was Arctic Computing in Hull, as well, where Charles Cecil and Revolution got started back in the 80s.

EG: It was the birth of the bedroom programmer, really. And the belief that we'd make millions of pounds. *[All laugh]*

What makes the region a good place to develop games?

Martyn Brown: The cost of living is low, and the people are really good.

JS: It's just a good place to live and work, really. But also, I think as a place it's a great network – everyone here regularly meets up and talk to each other. That's what Game Republic does, and it was set up by games companies.

EG: We're all friends – we don't work against each other. We work together for a common good.

Alex Amsel: I'm originally from Leamington Spa, and it's definitely a lot more laid back.

Some of Yorkshire's finest developers, right there.

People really do talk to each other much more than some other places.

PP: And like Martyn said, it's just a good place. We've got some great cities, each with lots of places to go, but five minutes outside of that you've got countryside.

JS: We're kind of spoilt for all of the games companies here – beyond the ones represented here, there's Revolution, Rockstar Leeds… we're really lucky.

EG: We all really love it here, and the proof is in the pudding – the business comes here. Companies worldwide are doing business with Yorkshire games developers.

Game Republic was set up with the aim of building a game development community in Yorkshire. What sorts of things does that entail?

MB: I think it's recognised when we speak to other developers at GDC – they're disappointed that their groups just don't collaborate like we do. I think it's the culture of the people, and that's what's difficult. No-one is prepared to take that first step; it's very guarded, almost very tense. That's something we've never had.

EG: I think, as another side of the coin though, we're not embarrassed to say we need help here – that when a company's in trouble, we rally around to find business for them, or use portions of their art department or whatever, just to make sure that there's money rolling in.

AA: I think there's a lot that can be learnt from each other – we've all worked with other developers on projects. And for us, looking at the non-games space too, actually being involved as a group of game developers helps in getting the attention of non-games companies who all want to get into the space. It means we can talk to them as individuals and then share that with everyone. Most people seem to think they're competing with each other, which is really silly.

> ***"It seems slighly frostier. We talk jokingly about the North/South divide, but people are slightly different."***
>
> ***Martyn Brown, Team 17***

PP: We don't mind ringing each other up and saying 'What do you know about this platform? Have you done anything on it yet?', and you'll get calls saying 'We're looking at doing something on this – have you got any kits free?'

JS: I regularly get calls from people looking for Flash developers or whatever, and I'll forward those around and share leads. As a region we want to grow; we want to bring more business into the region which helps everybody. The competition between each other isn't really an issue – there's enough work for everyone, and we're all doing interesting stuff. That's really important to us too – keeping the talent within the region, and encouraging people to come here, because it's a great place to live and work.

A lot of other developers are more guarded – why do you think that is? Has it got anything to do with the fact that, in many cases, a developer is beholden to a publisher?

MB: I don't think that's got much to do with it – you'll find there are people within studios owned by publishers who certainly haven't got that attitude. I think it's just down to the people at the end. Many people from the Midlands and the North East have come and attended Game Republic events and got a lot out of it. I think you can sense that there is this mood for sharing but it just seems a little frostier. It takes a shift in the people that are in the area. You know, we talk jokingly about the North/South divide, but people are slightly different.

AA: For whatever reason, there was the mood here originally when you guys started this that something needed to be done – and maybe there were a few that were a bit dubious, but actually it's been very good. When we talk to people about it, sometimes they'll say, 'Yeah, that's great – how many projects do you get out of it?' But it's not about that. It can be, but you can't go into it saying that you'll be getting a project worth however much after twelve months. If you think selfishly, that's when you start to think, 'But aren't we competing for projects?' Of course we're not – for contract work, we're competing with everyone across the world, not the people next door to you.

PP: There's definitely a certain pragmatism in Yorkshire that you do what's right for everyone rather than what's necessarily right for you. We've all been through bad times, studio closures, and certainly when we started Game Republic it was about trying to use all of our strengths together so we can all carry on in existence doing what we do best.

More and more studios are using contract workers, but in order to sustain this model these workers need a base where they can be sure of various work opportunities. Do you think Yorkshire can provide that?

EG: It already does. There are many contractors based here that do very well. And, because the heads of the companies talk with each other, we can find somewhere else for them to go once their period is up. There's lots of work around for them.

MB: I think it's probably different depending on the skill set, but certainly audio and art more than programming – those skills can be transferred; so they don't always need to be in the studio. In my experience, over the past four or five years there have been a number of people in use by studios working on that sort of thing.

PP: I think everyone is trying to keep their costs down and their workforce to a manageable level so that they don't have issues between projects, so it's a great place to be if you're a contractor. If there's not work in one studio, there's likely some at other studios in the area.

Do you ever share staff? Many studios have talked about it, but seem to be worried about confidentiality concerns.

PP: Absolutely, it happens a lot. At the end of the day, you've got NDAs in place. It's just access to more contractors.

EG: We've got absolutely no interest in shafting each other here – we want to help each other. That means that, if we've got someone who's not busy and someone else needs them, it suits all of us – I don't have to pay their wages for a while, and when I'm

busy again they'll come back. It's the best of both worlds, really.

How is the games education scene in Yorkshire?
PP: It's fantastic, really. We've got two universities in Leeds, two in Sheffield, and Hull, which is now Skillset accredited. It's fantastic. They'll talk to us, and we'll review projects and get involved with them. We've talked about the content of the courses with them.
EG: The universities have really made an effort to make sure their courses are useful and relevant. It was the case years ago that you'd get a graduate and have to train them, but these days they come almost ready to go.
PP: We're getting to the point in this region where they're considering courses on game design and production, whereas originally it was just art and programming.
AA: And that's an area we're interested in. I think a lot of the people who come out of these courses often only know one thing, and it's just starting to change. We're talking to Sheffield Hallam and Sheffield University about getting more involved, and we're really interested in the artistic and creative side – helping them understand it holistically instead of just being focused on one aspect.
JS: I think the links are important because we want the best students here too. Game Republic does a showcase, which gives direct links between students and companies, and I know that several students have got placements and jobs in Yorkshire studios from coming to the showcase last year. It's essential that games companies in our region talk to the universities.
PP: One thing that Game Republic has done in the past is sponsor students to have placements as well – we've had a couple of people come to the studio through this scheme and have ended up with jobs here.
JS: I think hearing that people have gone to university in the region and ended up with jobs in the local area is great for potential students. It's really attractive for them.

You mentioned game design courses – is that something that can be taught?
AA: Well, it can teach them the process, and it can teach them to focus. You might have someone say 'I've designed a game like *GTA*!' but they might actually be very creative, they just need to learn to focus. A lot of it's teamwork and communication – written as well as verbal. And also, people tend to have a style or genre of game that they play, and these courses can teach them about the breadth of the games industry. They have to understand the whole process, that there's a lot of people involved in big projects. If you're coming out of a course, regardless of whether you're going into a big company or a small one, you need to understand that process.

The games development industry is becoming a much broader place in terms of ways to deliver games to people, and the types of people that play. Do you think Yorkshire is innovating in this way?
JS: I know at least three companies that are doing iPhone stuff already. There's a huge breadth of companies doing stuff, from educational games to triple-A blockbusters.
MB: You just need to look at the guys at Rockstar Leeds and what they've done with the PSP and now the DS – technology-wise that's world-class. I don't think there's any shortage of that in the region at all.

Do companies in the region own much of their own IP?
JS: The Screen Yorkshire business development fund encourages companies to keep hold of their IP and it's really important to keep that in the region. We're always involved in IP discussions and we advise companies on how to keep most of their IP, or certainly more than before.
MB: It's been really difficult in the past ten years when we've been developing for closed systems, especially when it's being funded by first- or third-parties. Certainly now that we're with iPhone, PSP, WiiWare, DSi, XBLA and PSN we can retain that, and that's where advice – where talking to groups like Game Republic – is really useful.

> ***"[Right now] is difficult for a lot of people. But given the fact that we help each other our, we'll be stronger."***
>
> ***Paul Porter, Sumo***

AA: You've got to be really, really strong even now to keep hold of it. We've been very straight: you can't have our IP, no matter who you are. If the publishers know that from the start and they like what you're doing, it's not too bad. We were too scared to do that before, but now we're brave enough.

Now is a bad time for companies across the board, let alone developers – do you think companies in this region will be able to weather the storm?
PP: Absolutely, yeah. It's going to be difficult for a lot of people. But given the fact that, as we've said earlier, we help each other out, we'll be stronger. If one of us has got downtime, then we'll contract to each other, and I think that puts us in a very good stead.
EG: That's right – I think we've got the best chance here, given that Game Republic exists.
MB: I don't think we've got any unwieldly studios either – Sumo are always very busy, Rockstar Leeds is obviously doing brilliantly, and we're really busy at Team 17 too. We're not reliant on other publishers, which is a great thing, but it means we can't bloat and have to be quite lean. A lot of the third-party publishers are suffering somewhat, and it's nice not to be connected to that. Alex and Tuna are doing all sorts of things, Charles Cecil is busy with the *Broken Sword* stuff on Wii and DS. So, speaking about right now, we're all pretty busy.
PP: I think what a lot of us do is spread our risk – we've not got one great big project that's going to take the studio down with it if we sink.

WHO'S WHO

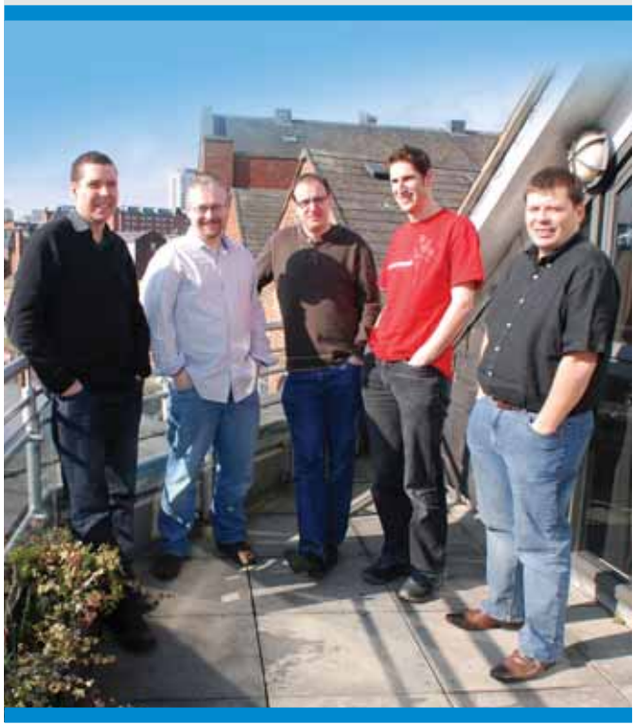
ELLIOT GAY, MD OF GAMERHOLIX AND CHAIRMAN OF GAME REPUBLIC
Founded in 2005, GamerHolix is a cross-platform developer that focuses on fostering relationships with others. Worked on *Little Britain: The Game*, and is now doing the *Clever Kids* range.

MARTYN BROWN, STUDIO DIRECTOR, TEAM 17
Founded in 1990 and predominantly known for Worms of recent times, Team 17 is now deep-rooted in the digital download sector. Working on various *Worms* titles, an update of *Alien Breed* and *Leisure Suit Larry*.

PAUL PORTER, STUDIO HEAD, SUMO
Sumo was founded in 2003, and now has 130 staff. It works on all platforms, from DS to PS3, and is currently working on *OutRun Arcade* and *Virtua Tennis 2009*.

ALEX AMSEL, CEO, TUNA
Tuna is an independent developer set up in 1996, working on contract work – over 70 games – but these days working on IGF-nominated 'claymation' game *Cletus Clay* on XBLA and other non-game projects.

JAMIE SEFTON, SECTOR MANAGER, GAME REPUBLIC
Game Republic is an organisation that aims to develop and promote the games industry in Yorkshire and Humberside.



SUMO DIGITAL

LOCATION:
Sheffield

EMPLOYEES:
130, plus 50 in India

PREVIOUS WORK:
Sega Superstars Tennis, Virtua Tennis 3, Outrun 2, Broken Sword 4, New International Track & Field

CURRENTLY WORKING ON:
OutRun Live Arcade, Virtua Tennis 2009

Sega's trust of Sumo culminated in creative control over all of its properties in Sega Superstars Tennis

Formed after Infrogrames shut down its Sheffield development office in 2003, Sumo has grown from 12 people at one site to 130 staff based in its Sheffield office with a further 50 at its second facility in Punan, India.

Originally working on non-game projects, the studio built its own 3D engine and was then working with Codemasters and Microsoft on the online component for *England International Football*. The experience, combined with having worked with BT on its Wireplay gaming service back in 1996, gave them an edge on the rapidly-burgeoning online sector. It attracted the attention of Sega, who it then asked if it could work on *Outrun 2*, and a long running relationship – which continues to this day – was born.

"As far as platforms go, we're working on every console platform going," says Carl Cavers, head of the European arm of Foundation 9, the studio network that purchased Sumo in 2007. "The only thing we're not doing is iPhone. We've got the tech to do it, but we're not just going to do a game for the sake of it – but if it's part of a set of SKUs for a project then we'll do it.

Sumo is perhaps best known for its work on Sega's properties – it was the first (and only) Western developer to be entrusted with the *Outrun* and *Virtua Tennis* series, and then ransacking its rich character back catalogue for *Sega Superstars Tennis*.

"We're still working with the same people we've been working with for the past few years," Cavers continues. "We've worked really hard to keep and maintain our relationships with clients – we think it's much easier to keep a client than to make a new one. So we go above and beyond to keep them happy.

> ***"We've become good at taking people's properties and shaping them in different ways, and we jump at the chance to reinvigorate classics."***

"For example, we don't have a long-running contract with Sega – it's new projects. We're only as good as the last thing we do with them. So we have to make sure that's a good impression, so we deliver what we promised to, and make sure they have a good experience. It's not just about the game. That's something we work really hard on. You know, you hear loads of times that people say 'it was an absolute nightmare to work with this developer, but it was a great product at the end'. We want both to be good."

The thing that Sumo prides itself on is transparency to clients, which is how it manages to encourage repeat business from publishers as diverse as Konami and Codemasters. "Every publisher is different, so we give them exactly what they want, and every iteration of the design we'll sit down and discuss it with them if that's the way they want to do it," explains 'design overlord' Sean Millard. "Konami and Sega, for example, were very involved on a weekly basis in design, and they had very very clear ideas of what they wanted, whereas Codemasters were a little bit more hands-off."

Although it might not have deliberately become the UK's chief IP reinvention house, it's certainly a situation the studio is happy with, says studio head Paul Porter: "We've become good at taking people's properties and shaping them in different ways. It's great, we love doing that. A lot of us here go way back, and we all share those rose-tinted glasses about games of old, the eighties and early nineties. We'll jump at any chance we have to reinvent or reinvigorate classics!"

TEAM 17

LOCATION:
Osset, Yorkshire

EMPLOYEES:
Approx. 90

PREVIOUS WORK:
Worms series, *Alien Breed* series, *Superfrog*, *Super Stardust*, *Body Blows* series

CURRENTLY WORKING ON:
Alien Breed XBLA, Worms Armageddon, Leisure Suit Larry

Team 17 is one of the longest-running studios still around today. Founded in 1990, it has released an astonishing 140 games in its time, across more than 16 different formats. The company found its fame on the Amiga platform, creating classic games such as *Alien Breed, Superfrog* and the title that built the empire – *Worms*.

Although often seen as just being the *Worms* company, Team 17 has long been working on external IP – most recently on a next-generation version of *Leisure Suit Larry*, called *Box Office Bust*, formerly for Vivendi but now to be published by Codemasters.

As well as continuing to evolve *Worms* on contemporary platforms, the studio's current main focus is a reinvention of the classic shooter *Alien Breed*, brought kicking and screaming into the current high-definition and online co-op world.

"We've been trying to convince publishers about a PS2 or PSP version of *Alien Breed* for years now, and we got very close, but it never happened for various reasons," says studio head Martyn Brown. "We've had a 15-year relationship with Epic, so we've used their engine to do our own thing, to release our own digital distribution title. We've taken the core game but taken a much more modern and evocative take on it. It's a bit like *Diablo 3* meets *Dead Space*.

"It's coming out in chapters – the game is in three chunks, each kind of a standalone game, with about five hours of gameplay. We're probably about five months from release."

At a time when many companies are trying to release their digital games on as many networks at possible, Team 17 has a definite preference for Microsoft: *Alien Breed* will initially only be on XBLA, and while Microsoft's service is getting a sequel to *Worms*, PSN is merely getting an update of the original title.

> ***"The industry's only going one way. I don't think it will be long before it's all digital distribution."***

"We get a lot of support from Microsoft, so we're releasing with them initially," says Brown. "*Worms* has done enormous numbers on Xbox Live Arcade. The PSN version will be interesting – a lot of the games on PSN tend to be experimental; there's not that many 'solid' games out there. So we'll see how that goes."

Despite being less than 90 people, the studio is working on over 10 SKUs currently. How does it manage to work on so many things at once?

"We've been around a while, so we've got really mature technology. There's maybe 20 or 25 people working on *Alien Breed* because we're using Unreal. It could be treble that if we weren't using UE3, so that's pretty efficient. The internal tech for *Worms* has been around for years, so it's only been four or five guys on the PS3 version, maybe 10 on the Xbox Live Arcade one. And two guys on the iPhone version."

But the real story for Team 17 is how it's embracing the digital space – it predicts that its current *Worms* titles for the PSP, DS and Wii platforms might be the last physical products it ever makes.

"We're really embracing the digital space. It's absolutely more promising for us – the industry's only going one way. I don't think it'll be that long before it's all digital. Plus, it means we can self-publish as developers. We had six years of publishing in the retail space in the early nineties. Things were different then: it came to a point where more money was being spent on marketing than development, so we backed out and have stayed developers for about ten years. With digital platforms the marketing isn't such a big deal – it's kind of there in front of you, so it seems the right time for us to re-enter that."

PIT STOP PRODUCTIONS

LOCATION:
Yorkshire

Pit Stop Productions is a company that you might not have heard of – but it's on the verge of making a big splash in the industry.

The company performs the usual range of outsourced audio services: music composition, sound effects, editing and voice-over recording. The difference, though, is that Pit Stop has put a special focus on efficiency, helping drive costs down while maintaining the quality you'd expect.

That starts with the location, explains company head John Sanderson. "The idea of being up here in Yorkshire is to get away from the high London studio prices," he says. "We've still got a studio in London if needs be, and we're only two hours away, or an hour from Manchester. For the most part, the voice talent is all prepared to come here, and failing that we can use the London space."

It permeates as far as the studio's structure, too, which is surprisingly 'parallel' – helping keep wasted time to a minimum.

"We have two studios that share a live space, which means that two people can work on the same track, essentially halving the time – and therefore the cost – for our clients," Sanderson continues. "And because we're embracing connectivity, if the client wanted us to, we could be running six different sessions across the world simultaneously. It's all about being as efficient as possible."

As a new studio, though, it's important to have a breakout title that shows what the company is capable of. Luckily, Pit Stop has had just that, in the shape of *House of the Dead: Overkill*, which it scored, wrote and recorded vocal performances for.

"It's great that we've had a project like *House of the Dead: Overkill*, and that it seems to be resonating so well with people. That's thanks to Sega and Headstrong just saying, 'Okay guys, here it is: just get on with it.' The

idea for *HotD* was to take the Wii, in association with those guys, and just make it for hardcore gamers. We realised that if we could have as much violence in there as possible, and punctuate that with as much profanity, it would it be hilarious.

"All we had for the storyline was that there was this cop, Washington, who called everyone a motherfucker – except for the guy who actually fucks his mother. He was to be teamed up with this straight-laced guy G, and you've got this great relationship that works. For us, to have cutscenes commented on, is great – we're really chuffed with it. All we wanted to create for the game was this 'funness' and stupidity – and it's gone down really well."

JUST ADD WATER

LOCATION:
Otley, near Leeds

While Just Add Water may be a relatively new developer, with over 100 years of games development experience and 40 titles under the team's collective belts, that doesn't mean it's got startup sensibilities.

Although it's largely been doing background contract work for the past few years, it's just signed a deal with Sony for a digital download title on PSN and PSP.

"Last year we got together three presentation packs for different projects and sent them off to various publishers," explains Stewart Gilray. "Every single one of them came back saying they wanted the same project. But I was interested in working with Sony, because that way you basically cut out all of the middlemen – and you get a better deal with less people involved."

Intriguingly, the studio is one of the new wave of distributed developers, with team members scattered around the UK. Although its official base is in the little village of Otley – a village that would be perfectly described as 'picture postcard' were it not for its gross overuse – key members of the team are elsewhere. It's not a deliberate structural decision, but it's not exactly a bad way of working either, Gilray explains.

"The main core of the PS3 team are in Croydon, mainly because that's where both of them live. It may be that during the project we'll get them up to move up here, but right now there's no need to. Five or six years ago, we couldn't have worked this way – there was no sustainable broadband connections anywhere. I remember working with companies that relied on satellite uplinks or, more commonly, discs in the post. But now, we upload everything to a central server – not just our project management stuff, but concept art and everything else – and it's almost as if we're all in the same room.

"We do have regular meet-ups, though, every month or so – although it sounds far, realistically it's only two hours away, so it's not that bad."

TUNA

LOCATION:
Sheffield

Tuna was founded in 1996, and spent twelve years working predominantly on contract work for other developers – 'sitting in the background' in their own words – on handhelds and mobiles.

Although a good constant stream of work, there is a downside to doing a lot of contracting, founder Alex Amsel explains: "Outsource work is limiting. Either you grow, like Sumo, or you end up being bought out, as we nearly were a couple of times. We wanted to work on interesting things, and we wanted to have a long term future – we didn't want to be reliant on everyone else, because we thought they were making mistakes."

As such, it's turned its focus around somewhat in the past year, shifting from being a game developer to what it calls a 'game production company'.

"It's the same as the film and TV worlds – you have a small team that does work on the project, but generally speaking we want to have an idea – one generated internally or in conjunction with someone else

– and one way or another actually help them," Amsel continues.

"Whether we do the development work in-house or externally doesn't actually matter, we just want to be the centre of those ideas. We want people to think that, if they've got a great idea, they can come to us and we can make it happen.

"So, for example, the idea of our current game *Cletus Clay* came from the claymation genius Anthony Flack, who lives out in New Zealand. We took his idea, which was for a very casual game, and helped work it into a fully-fledged multiplayer brawler for Xbox Live Arcade and PC. It wasn't our idea, and we kind of like that – there are fantastic ideas out there that just don't get made."

YORKSHIRE UK
AHEAD OF
THE GAME

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars for DS from Rockstar Leeds

Cletus Clay: nominated for the IGF Excellence in Visual Art award 2009

OutRun Online Arcade and Virtua Tennis 2009 for SEGA

Worms PSN, Worms 2: Armageddon XBLA and Alien Breed Evolution

Clever Kids range for Wii/DS/PC

Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars - Director's Cut for Wii/DS

Also featuring…

Just Add Water Ltd (New PSN/PSP title for SCEE), Sports Director (Football Director, DS), Zushi (Skate City Heroes, Wii/DS), Distinctive Developments (Anytime Pool, Mobile/iPhone), Pit Stop Productions (soundtrack/audio for House of the Dead: Overkill, Madworld) and more...

Game Republic is an industry-led games network for the Yorkshire and Humber region. If you'd like more information about development in the north of England and how we can help you keep ahead of the game, contact Game Republic.

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BUILD

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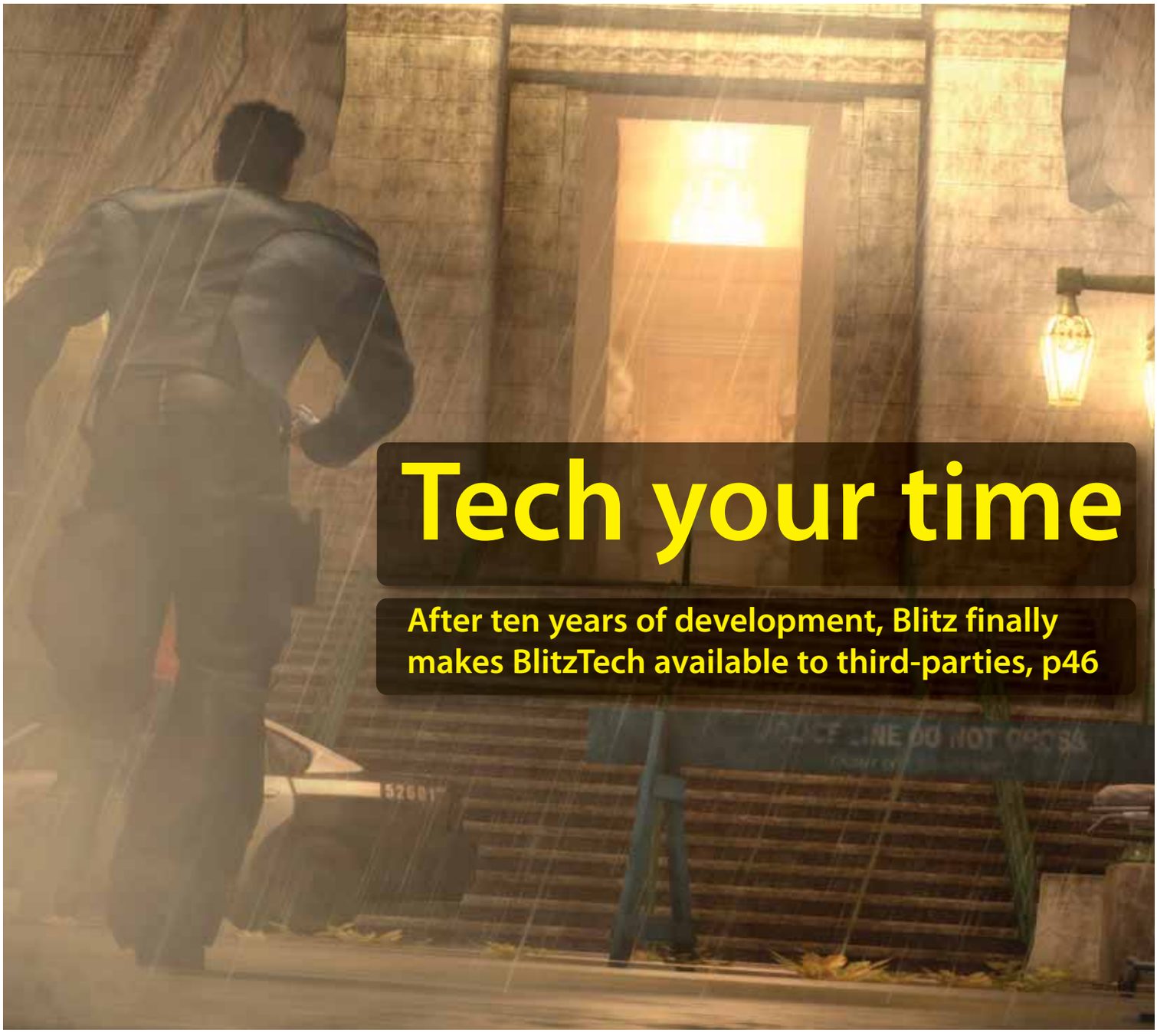


Tech your time

After ten years of development, Blitz finally makes BlitzTech available to third-parties, p46

EPIC DIARIES: THE LATEST UPDATES TO UNREAL ENGINE 3 > P51

Value-added

WHEN THE WORLD ECONOMY started going awry last year, the games industry as a whole was quick to say it was recession-proof – before quickly attempting to stifle the news of thousands of job cuts behind a fake cough.

The middleware and tools industry has made the same assurance, but whether it's true or not still remains to be seen. There's a good argument in their favour; one far less spurious than 'people still need entertainment'. The sad fact is that many games studios are now leaner than they were six months ago, but they still need to produce games to the same quality as before. In that regard, it makes sense: if middleware saves them time, it can save them money.

Catch many industry people on the quiet and they'll admit that, really, the economic downturn is being used as a smokescreen for a necessary focus on cost reduction – one that had been a long time coming. As Peter Molyneux pointed out in our big interview last month, we're at the point in this generation where we shouldn't be spending so much on making games – our technology should be stable; we're not getting accustomed to new platforms.

As such, the middleware companies that might end up suffering are those who are tracking their prices and revenues to the sky-high budgets because, for the large part, they might not be so sky high this time next year. While middleware can definitely be a saving over doing it yourself, quite how much of a saving that really is will be more important now than ever.

You might notice a small change to the layout of the Build section this month: it's been over two years since the section was last redesigned, and so we're giving it a few little tweaks. Let us know what you'd like to see more (and indeed less) of at the address below.

Ed Fear
ed.fear@intentmedia.co.uk

< CODING >

Blitz gets into the middleware game

The long-running UK independent is looking to share its tools with other studios as it marks ten years of internal tech development. **Ed Fear** heads to Leamington Spa for a run-down…

BlitzTech powered Headstrong's celebrated House of the Dead Overkill, displaying its performance on lower-end platforms

TIME WAS, IF YOU ever wanted a quote about the perils and evils of middleware, the Oliver brothers were first on your list. Staunchly independent not only as a studio but also on the technology front, they'd invested ten years into a common technology framework that has been used on almost every Blitz title in that time period – rendering external tech unnecessary.

Which made it all the more amusing to hear that the company is embarking on a licensing programme for BlitzTech, looking to seed its technology to studios worldwide. How did the critic become the restauranteur?

The irony is not lost on its CTO, Andrew Oliver. "That's a very good point," he laughs. "But what's different is that we would never try to sell middleware to people who have their own tech, like Eurocom. We are trying to appeal to studios who have already decided to buy someone else's tech. Once that decision has been made, we think we're the best, and that's the message we're putting out there.

"The difference for us is that, if we were starting again today, would we invest another ten years in tech before releasing a game? Probably not. These people are looking for a starting point, whereas we're not."

The tech itself has everything you'd expect from a contemporary engine, with high-end visuals that might be a surprise if you're judging it on Blitz's usual licensed output. But BlitzTech's differential is in how it handles multiple platforms and its comprehensive suite of tools.

"It's truly multi-platform – you can have all of your versions ship on the same day if you wanted to. It's also relatively easy to switch platform during development, which is something that used to be quite a struggle," says Richard Hackett, Blitz's technical director.

"All of the different platforms are all edited within the same levels. We have a system that allows you to set up different graphics pipeline for each platform – designers don't see that pipeline but artists can go in and tweak the assets for each different release. You've effectively got the same game running on different consoles."

BLITZ CREED

Blitz believes that the key difference isn't that its tech runs on multiple platforms, but rather that it maximises its potential on all of the consoles that it's running on, explains Hackett. "One of the main areas for the engine team now is pushing the consoles further and further, and there's always more room to do that. We're really pleased with where we are, and we really think that's one of our particular strengths.

"For example, in terms of PS3, we're not stuck in the hole that certain other engines are – if you look at the Xbox 360 version of *Dead to Rights* and compare it with the PS3 one, you won't really see a difference. When people say cross-platform, they assume that it's the lowest common denominator across all of them, but

It's difficult to show just how astonishing Dead to Rights looks through the medium of arty screenshots, but we were blown away – and we'd only just watched 'that' Final Fantasy XIII trailer

actually this is the best of both words – and the game teams don't have to worry about it. They can write their code for the 360 and it'll run on PS3 exactly the same. It's the same code base, the same asset base."

The other emphasis has been on an intuitive, comprehensive toolset that enables designers and artists to fully sculpt the game experience without burdening programmers, Hackett adds. "Back in the Renderware days, middleware companies would boast about how many millions of polygons they could push.

"While there's still an element of that, these days we've quite rightly moved away to being about the production tools, and how people can make good games efficiently, and letting people put their creativity into the game without the tech getting in the way. So that's where we've put our focus. We've really pushed it over the years, and we've got a really thorough toolset that encompasses a lot of different areas."

And thorough it is. Instant live editing on target consoles is particularly impressive, but more interesting is quite how many sectors the tool targets. Asset management, with support for remote working and full rollback of all changes ever made to the project? Check. Distributed asset processing for offloading complicated processes to idle machines? Check. Support for stereoscopic 3D as detailed in last month's feature? Check.

Impressive as that is, the question many will be asking right now is one of support. After all, surely a studio has enough on its plate without dealing with needy customers?

The core technology group at Blitz, which comprises about ten per cent of the studio, has actually worked with the internal games teams in a provider-customer model, almost in preparation for this day. And the route to the wider middleware market hasn't been as instant as may originally appear: the studio has been working with select external partners for the last eighteen months, most recently with Headstrong on the acclaimed *House of the Dead: Overkill*.

"We wanted to see if it really was a commercial project, and whether we could provide the support necessary. We were friendly with Headstrong anyway, and we really wanted to work on someone with a high-profile game – but we didn't realise back then quite how high profile it would be," explains Philip Oliver.

"Particularly on the Wii, there's not many engines out there that can do this kind of thing – and on top of that they had their own internal systems, so had to find something that was better than that too.

"The idea was that, you know, there are a lot of nightmare stories out there about using middleware, and even court cases. That's absolutely not what we want. That's why we've gone into this so softly – we don't want to let anyone down. And that's also why we partnered with someone we knew; if it had been a complete disaster we wouldn't have ended up in court."

Luckily, it wasn't – the partnership went well, and Blitz's current focus is on publicising the collaboration, and gauging industry reaction from there.

One final thing the Olivers are clear on is that BlitzTech isn't for everyone, despite the wide range of games it's used on internally. "It's not about volume of customers, it's about quality. We'll say that upfront: we don't want every single person making a casual game using this, in fact we'll dissuade it. We're looking for games of this ilk or better; it should be triple-A games as that's what the tech is geared for."

blitzgamesstudios.com/blitztech

GUIDE: METRIC & ANALYSIS TOOLS

With more and more games adopting a post-release maintenance system, having data about your players' experiences is more important than ever if you want to keep people involved. **Ed Fear** takes a look at the metrics tools available…

It's often said that the future of games is a more service-orientated model, where content and updates are provided far beyond the mastering date. But to make the extra effort worthwhile, you need to make sure that people keep on playing the game – and while providing new content is a big part of that, making sure that the game is still fun to play is also key.

Massively multiplayer games are often the example, and with reason: often featuring a huge number of different classes, making sure that none of them are significantly more powerful than the other is paramount – especially if you have any sort of player vs. player element. No MMO developer, big or small, is immune from the calls of 'nerf!' on official forums.

And it's not just multiplayer games – how many of your players are completing your game? Which levels are posing a problem? While an increased focus on play-testing during development is encouraging, only so much can be done before the game goes gold. Being able to see the experiences of millions of players can only help us all make better games – and there's more tools than ever out there to help you do it.

EPIC

TECHNOLOGY
Unreal Engine 3

CLIENTS
Many, including Midway, Sony Online Entertainment and Epic

PLATFORMS
PC, PS3, Xbox 360

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
mrein@epicgames.com

The metrics tech built by Epic for Gears of War 2 is now available to all

www.unrealtechnology.com

Are there many areas left for Epic to explore with it's near-standard Unreal Engine 3? The latest 2009 updates to the engine include the introduction of the Unreal Master Control Program, a set of services that were developed by the *Gears of War 2* team and have now been rolled into the stock engine. Developers can track online populations and use offline data analysis services to profile game data, such as top-down level heat maps based on variables such as death location.

GAMESPY

TECHNOLOGY
ATLAS

CLIENTS
Many, including Nintendo, EA and Rockstar

PLATFORMS
PS3, PS2, PSP, Wii, DS, PC

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
Via website

The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth II used Gamespy's ATLAS

www.poweredbygamespy.com

GameSpy's various multiplayer services have been around for quite some time now, but have been diversifying of late. Although primarily geared towards leaderboards and persistent user-tracking, ATLAS can also be used to store any sort of data about your users – including their progress and their experiences. This can then all be collated with a web tool, so that overpowered weapons and map bottlenecks can be quickly – and easily – identified.

VALVE

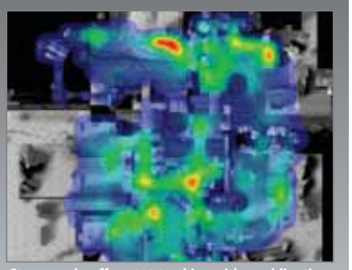
TECHNOLOGY
Steamworks

CLIENTS
Sports Interactive, Relic, Valve

PLATFORMS
PC

PRICE
Free

CONTACT
jasonh@valvesoftware.com



Steamworks offers stat-tracking with no obligation to sell through Steam

www.steampowered.com

Much has been said about Valve's Steamworks suite – particularly about its unlimited bandwidth, no certification and impressive community features. But it also allows partner developers to integrate metrics into their games to get a better feel of where players are stumbling. From simple things such as staggering and then monitoring achievements to reporting your own data, the suite also gives you access to stats about the hardware your game is being played on, too.

+7 SYSTEMS

TECHNOLOGY
+7 Balance Engine

CLIENTS
MrJoy

PLATFORMS
Not applicable

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
contact@plus7systems.com

The +7 Balance Engine iteratively examines and adjusts parameters to ensure a balanced experience

www.plus7systems.com

The problem with any game design, says +7 Systems, is that it will likely have inbalances. Which might not sound awful, but when applied to online games such as MMOs and first person shooters, the player base will quickly find the dominant strategies and exploit them. In comes the +7 Balance Engine, then, which runs on your own server and accepts periodic play data. Given a 'game universe' description it claims to be able to find those weaknesses and balance them iteratively. Is it the end for nerfing?

KEYRELEASE

Havok AI

The company may dominate the physics market, but Havok's ambitions don't end at simulating Newton's laws, **Ed Fear** discovers. Its next target: artificial intelligence…

PRODUCT: AI middleware
COMPANY: Havok
PRICE: Available on request
CONTACT: +353 1 472 4300
www.havok.com

Top left: Havok AI's big selling feature is the ability for its agents to navigate moving objects

Top Right: Havok prides itself on the high-speed navmesh in its new artificial intelligence tech

Above: Meanwhile, Havok Cloth is finding its feet amongst developers thanks to its Wii functions

The problem with being a middleware company is that, with few exceptions, it's a pretty targeted operation, aimed at simplifying – or empowering – in a certain sector. Which is great for targeted selling, but should you be lucky enough to find your middleware dominating that very sector, there remains the question of where to go from there.

The answer, usually, is diversification. Havok showed the first signs of such a movement last year when it demoed two new products – Havok Cloth and Havok Destruction – which have their roots firmly in the physics space but are tangental enough to stand as separate products.

The announcement of its latest product at GDC, then, might initially suggest a further diversification. Havok AI is, as the name suggests, Havok's foray into the artifical intelligence sector – one of the major middleware areas still largely untapped. But, rather than dip its toe into the murky waters of behaviours and decision making, Havok AI is resolutely focused on the more measurable – and therefore more in-demand – problem of pathfinding.

Naturally, the core foundation of the middleware is the navmesh – with the company particularly proud of the super-quick generation process. "We've taken a model with 150,000 polygons and generated a navmesh in under four seconds," says principle engineer Dave Gargan. "It's designed to let people rapidly iterate on all levels. You make a change, you get to see it immediately."

"We also allow you to have one navmesh and use it for multiple different characters in the game. In other implementations you'd need one for each character, but we can vary some properties – such as the width of the character – and it'll find new paths. It's a huge memory saving compared to other solutions."

> ***"Havok AI's local steering allows on-screen agents to dynamically avoid objects that are in the process of moving."***

All of which is well and good – another robust path-finding solution won't be unwelcome on the market – but it's nothing revolutionary. The answer is what sits on top of the nav-mesh technologies – a dynamic pathfinding module and a local steering module – that leverage Havok's experience in the physics market, and brings something new to the market.

"This is where we've concentrated: it's engineered from the ground up to work in highly dynamic environments. This is what our customers said to us: as we raised the bar with physics, environments are changing much faster, and so now AI has to keep up, and that's a difficult problem. If your representation is taking 12 hours to generate offline, getting that to change in real-time is not an easy task."

While 'dynamic pathfinding' might be something touted by other AI middleware, it's the local steering module that sets Havok AI apart. As you'd expect, it allows you to simulate flocks, crowds and the such, but it also allows the agents to dynamically avoid objects that are in the process of moving. That may sound obvious, but many other 'dynamic' pathfinding tools will wait until the moving objects have settled before adjusting paths.

"If you don't provide characters with the ability to react to moving objects, you end up with a situation where even the relatively slow objects are potentially 'invisible'. The AI will be completely unaware of it. As a physics company, we understand the nature of how objects move in games. We know when things happen, and how much things happen in different places.

"In the same way that we concentrated on a really robust collision detection pipeline for Havok Physics, we're focusing on pathfinding in AI. It plays exactly to our core competencies: it's really complex, geometrical problems that reply a lot of CPU time and robustness, and that's what we do strongly across all of our products."

Cut from the cloth

Out of the two products Havok released mid-way through last year, perhaps the most exciting was Havok Destruction – if only because it plays to our natural instincts to see things smashed to pieces.

But in fact, the one that the market has reacted best to is its counterpart, Havok Cloth. While drapery simulation might not be the most glamorous of areas, it's clearly something developers are after.

"It's been the biggest selling Havok product in our history," says Dave O'Meara, CEO of Havok. "It's just taken off. Even though it was only launched in the middle of last year, it will already appear in its first game within the next few months. That shows you how quickly it can be integrated into our customers' titles."

And while curtains, capes and dresses might be the most obvious uses for the tech, perhaps what might explain the demand is its scalability.

"It's very deliberately designed to work all the way down to the Wii," explains engineer Dave Gargan. "There are a lot of uses for it on those environments, including things like soft-body ponytails."

HEARD ABOUT

Sounds like a good event

John Broomhall talks to Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's Michael Kelly about the current state of game audio and the Audio Engineering Society's new involvement in the field…

Game audio is all grown up. Increasingly featured in the mainstream and specialist media, celebrated by awards bodies worldwide and with our own Develop Conference audio track attracting film and television practitioners alike, we now inhabit a world where recording studios, post-production houses and freelancers across the audio board are eyeing up the games business with interest. Many students aspire to a career in game sound, while academics find immediate, practical relevance in the medium for their cutting edge research work on acoustics, spatial audio, perception of audio and DSP programming.

So, will a growing involvement in game audio by the wider mainstream technical and academic communities bring us benefits?

SCEE's Michael Kelly, who is also co-chair of the Audio Engineering Society's (AES) technical committee on Audio for Games believes so, seeing the AES as providing an important meeting ground.

"The AES offers a forum for in-depth technical discussion. It brings together academics and technical practitioners – scientists and engineers – to see how we'll push the envelope technically in future. And with the industry desperately needing more audio programmers, the AES can help by focusing on the technical content of educational courses to ensure appropriate skill sets. The other area is standards: AES is a recognised and respected pro-audio body for invoking, maintaining and developing standards – both its own, and those of others, such as the MMA. There's a real need for this technical forum that isn't fulfilled by other organisations," says Kelly.

These aspirations were evidenced during a recent AES event in London, centred firmly on the technical aspects of game audio, featuring a keynote from Codemasters' Stephen Root and presentations from Codie's technical audio guru, Simon Goodwin.

"There was a fresh emphasis on the need for standardisation – to agree on ways we do things, but standardising in ways that aren't limiting, for instance, MIDI doesn't make you write 4/4 dance music just because someone else uses it to do that – you can represent all types of music," Kelly continues.

"There was broad agreement on the need for all parties to jointly define education curricula and a useful dialogue was commenced. Then there was the low-level technical discussion on DSP algorithms and the like. As well as sound designers, audio programmers and academic researchers, we were delighted to welcome representatives from Genelec, Phillips and various plug-in manufacturers – all there to engage with game audio and help define its technical future.

"You didn't have to understand all the maths of, say, building hybrid reverbs with convolution qualities – although it was there if you wanted it! The meeting of academic and industry minds was fascinating, and that community and collaboration now continues online via our LinkedIn group."

An AES focus on game audio demonstrates just how far we've come, and it's good news for consumers. Today's discussion will spawn tomorrow's innovations and ultimately better sound in videogames.

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www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

Stephen Root

Director of audio at Codemasters and keynote speaker at the AES event

"Research centres are currently pioneering technologies which will shape future game audio experiences, while universities are educating the next generation of game audio practitioners, so it's really important that our industry engages fully with these sectors. I personally found it very exciting to have the chance to discuss my own hopes and visions for game audio with such a diverse range of audio contributors.

"At Codemasters, we take collaboration with academia very seriously. We already have some joint research projects in the pipeline, and as a result of the event we now have far better links and more exciting opportunities to explore. I hope the AES can follow up on the success of the event, I think we all stand to benefit – and ultimately so will gamers."

Simon Goodwin

Principal audio programmer, Codemasters

"We've reached a tipping point in which the needs of games now drive the audio industry, rather than making do with tech intended for cinema. Game audio is more demanding and often more advanced than movie sound. Accurate audio is the key way to inform players of what's happening off-screen, and potentially a matter of life and death for gamers. Headphone and surround audio will benefit greatly from industry links the AES has fostered.

"The packed 3D7.1 demonstrations on PC and PS3 over HDMI, using Codemasters' EGO game engine, went down a storm. We've shown that true 3D audio, with height, is practical on 7.1 speaker systems, while preserving compatibility with CD and DVD audio. This is no pipe-dream – it works now in titles like *DiRT* and *Race Driver GRID*.

"While this is a significant first for Codemasters and EGO, industry consensus on the details is vital – we can't afford multiple standards, or the confusion that still exists in 5.1 horizontal surround, with game and cinema expectations divergent and poorly understood. As an independent international authority the AES is collating the interests of equipment and game makers – including EA, Rockstar, Sony and Microsoft – who all backed Codemasters' mission to take game audio into true 3D at AES."

NEW UNREAL ENGINE 3 FEATURES REVEALED AT GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE 2009

At GDC 2009, Epic Games demonstrated several major enhancements that have been built into Unreal Engine 3 to make developing great games easier for licensees.

Unreal Lightmass, our new global illumination solver, produces high quality lightmaps within the Unreal Engine development environment. Because it requires relatively little filtering of indirect lighting, Unreal Lightmass produces smooth bounced lighting without detracting from indirect shadows. Also, the custom Swarm distribution solution enables the system to scale effectively, which ensures fast performance. Unreal Lightmass provides advanced global illumination that requires no third-party software or integration code.

The Unreal Content Browser features a modern interface and improves the way users view and manage assets in the Unreal Engine. In addition to manipulating objects and packages, users can organise assets by tagging them or placing them in collections. Finding assets is made simple with intuitive search and filter features. The Content Browser enables users to locate, preview and manage all assets in the game, regardless of whether they are loaded or not.

The new Unreal Master Control Program (MCP) is a service-oriented architecture (SOA) that focuses on providing a highly scalable and available set of services to enhance players' online experiences. Currently offered is the same set of services used by *Gears of War 2* including announcements, settings changes, online population tracking, and data collection for hardware, profile, and game stats. Unreal MCP also provides business intelligence services for offline data analysis, including general hardware and user profile analytics and domain-specific data mining such as level-based heat maps over a multitude of analytical dimensions.

UNREAL ENGINE 3 EXPANDS ONLINE FOOTPRINT WITH ATLAS TECHNOLOGY

Epic Games China has released its Atlas Technology MMO development suite. Consisting of persistent world server technology and MMO content creation and management tools that work directly with Unreal Engine 3, Atlas Technology provides a solid foundation on which to build MMOs, casual and session-based games, plus community and e-commerce applications.

Atlas Technology extends UE3's functionality to support persistent online games. Epic Games China is using the suite for its projects, plus Atlas has been licensed by game developers in North America, Asia and Europe.

ACONY ON THE MAKING OF PARABELLUM, THE FREE-TO-PLAY MMO FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Acony Games plans to launch *Parabellum*, its free-to-play massively multiplayer online first-person shooter (MMO-FPS), later this year.

Product manager Lars Janssen recently spoke with reporter John Gaudiosi about how his team was able to ramp up production on the game with Unreal Engine 3.

"Those who had little to no experience with this technology were able to produce good results within a very short time frame," said Janssen. "We were astonished at how fast they were able to use UE3 and its respective tools effectively. UE3 allows for multiple tasks to be carried out on a level in parallel and thereby helps to efficiently use our resources."

Janssen found that the engine's particle effects tool, in conjunction with Kismet, enabled visual effects artists to create complex effects without extra programmer support, which reduced development time and also cut down on sources of errors.

"UE3 is a powerful engine, which allows state-of-the-art graphics combined with great customisability and flexibility," said Janssen. "Apart from that, it's a well-known engine in the gaming industry and therefore a seal of quality, especially in the highly competitive free-to-play market."

Acony's MMO-FPS hybrid *Parabellum*

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

Triangle Game Conference
Raleigh, NC
April 2th - 30th, 2009

Electronic Entertainment Expo
Los Angeles, CA
June 2-4, 2009

GameHorizon Conference
Newcastle, England
June 23-24, 2009

Develop Conference
Brighton, England
July 14-16, 2009

Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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Mark Rein is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.
www.epicgames.com

Project Runaway

When you've got ten studios spread around the world, all working on projects of vastly different scale and scope, project management can quickly become a difficult task. **Develop** caught up with Kuju's technical director Adrian Hawkins to find out how it uses Perforce to keep on top of it all…

When a company is one of the world's biggest independent games developers, with sites and teams spread across the world, keeping track of the sheer volume of code and other assets is no mean feat. However, Kuju manages to keep on top of all this and still react rapidly to a continual cycle of deadlines by using software configuration management to integrate and manage projects.

Since joining Kuju in the '90s, technical director Adrian Hawkins has seen how SCM has become an essential part of the video games industry by helping developers to stay informed about all aspects of a particular project. At the same time, SCM takes a great burden off their shoulders by managing and versioning the majority of source code, documents and assets, regardless of the scale or complexity of the game involved.

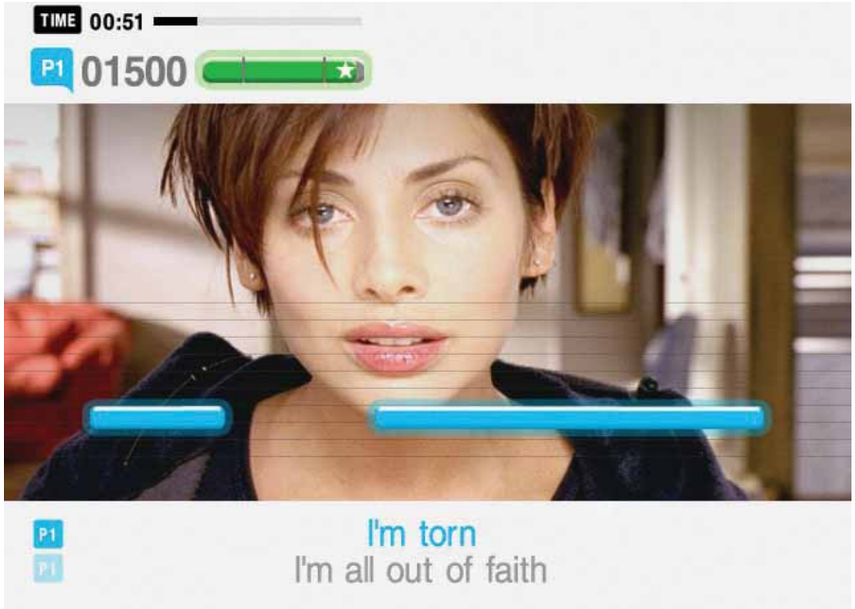
With ten sites across the globe and approximately 400 staff, Kuju is certainly a large-scale operation – especially when the studios are as diverse as the likes of doublesix and Zoë Mode, each with different focuses and objectives.

The scale of Kuju's business success brings its own challenges, says Hawkins. "Our development teams can be quite dispersed. In one recent example, we spread product development across five different sites. Then, on any one site, we'll have multiple products being developed and teams often need to collaborate on common code bases.

"Also, like most of the industry, we work under development contracts that have monthly milestones which we must meet in order for our customers – the publishers – to pay us. In addition to the target of shipping the game, these regular milestones represent time pressures to complete tasks and deliver builds, so the underlying software platform cannot be unreliable. It has to work smoothly."

When Hawkins first joined the company, all code and assets had to be integrated manually, which could easily consume whole days. "As soon as we started using SCM, we had immediate productivity benefits," he explains. "For instance, as source code can go through a lot of iterations and some code needs to be shared by multiple teams, numerous variants of common code can exist. Digital asset databases can be very large too, and need to accommodate contributions from external resources. SCM is vital for managing these issues."

> ***"Today, due to the size and dispersed nature of our organisation, it would be unthinkable to handle source control manually."***



For the past five years, the SCM tool of choice for Kuju is Perforce, exclusively for source control and often for asset management too. Aside from its scalability and ability to handle large data sets, Hawkins cites the Perforce Proxy as particularly useful for the company. A self-maintaining proxy server that caches versioned files for re-use on any local network with remote access to the Perforce Server, any number of proxies can be quickly deployed without requiring additional hardware or software.

"The Perforce Proxy functionality has been pretty key for us in managing dispersed development. It gives us better network utilisation, better response time for end users and minimises the manpower and costs that we would otherwise have had. It would be much worse if everyone was running their own local source control server and we then had to pull all that code together by hand."

The ability to have a visual representation of the branching feature within Perforce has also proved its value to Kuju. "Because of the way we work, we may need to share code across teams, but local teams may need to vary that code – so we could have lots of code that is very similar but with slight variations. The Revision Graph tool enables us to visualise who has changed what on different branches: imagine a sideways tree. We can not only see changes to code, we can view how the code was integrated back again. The Revision Graph gives us a map and shows how all the code ties together."

Furthermore, Kuju has taken the benefits of SCM one stage further by building its own set of technology around Perforce, using the available APIs, adds Hawkins. "Comprehensive asset management is very important to us. Custom art – which is often stored in the same repository as code – represents a lot of files. So, to support our custom art production pipeline, we've built more advanced search functionality on top of Perforce. It means we can have metadata-based searches on assets in our database for game specific information."

One thing is clear: Adrian Hawkins views SCM as an integral part of how he and his colleagues work. "Perforce has become a core part of our standard suite of development software. Today, it would be unthinkable to handle source control manually because of the size and dispersed nature of our organisation. We're confident that we have a platform that will continue to scale to meet future challenges."

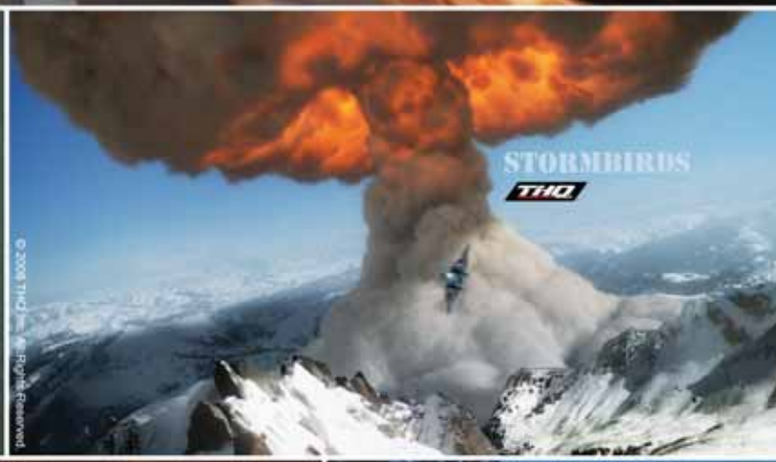
ADRIAN HAWKINS' TOP TIPS FOR SCM

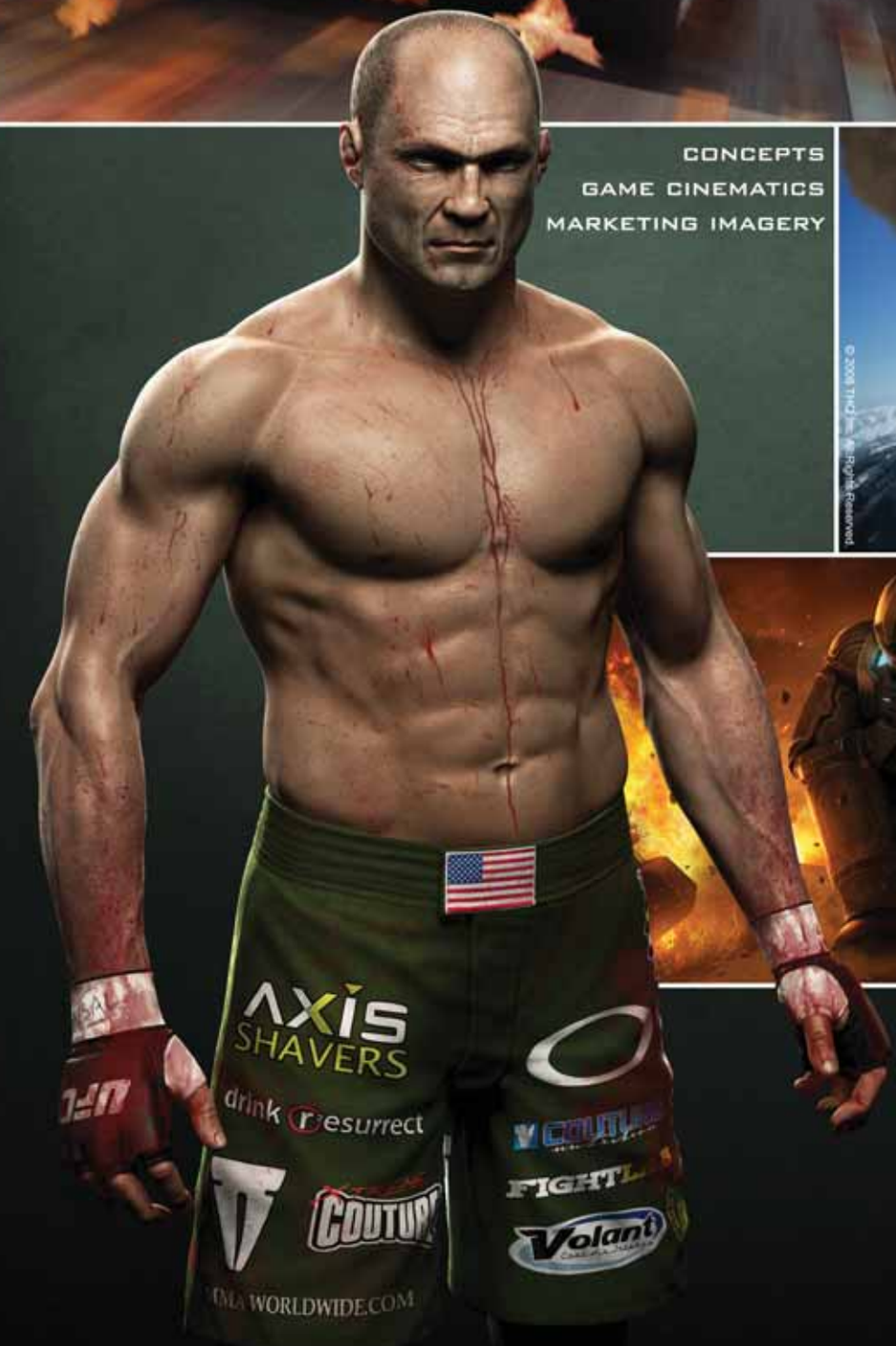
Explore SCM's features:
"Don't just think of it for checking stuff in and out. Take the time to look around your SCM system and find out what else it can do."

Use SCM to help manage dispersed development:
"Proxies simplify integration of dispersed sites, thus reducing manpower and associated costs."

Take your SCM to the next level:
"Use the APIs provided to enhance and tailor your SCM system to match your company's specific needs."

CONCEPTS
GAME CINEMATICS
MARKETING IMAGERY





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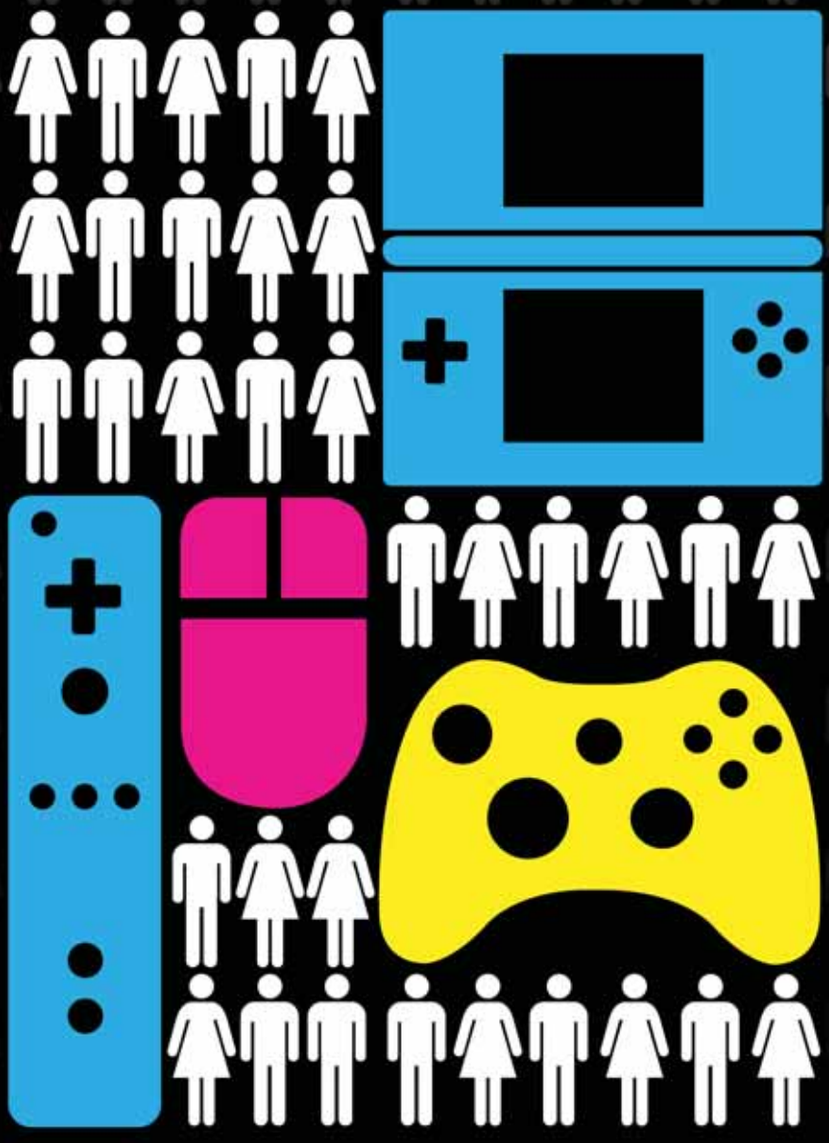

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TOOLS:
Crytek announces CryEngine 3
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SERVICES:
Babel forms two strategic partnerships
p61

KEY CONTACTS

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Studio News

This month: Splash Damage, Warner, Turbine and more

Neil Alphonso, formerly the lead level designer on Guerrilla Games' *Killzone 2*, has joined London studio **Splash Damage**.

Alphonso is heading up the developer's level design team on a yet to be revealed game that Splash Damage has pitched as a triple-A release.

"The Splash Damage guys know how to build great multiplayer experiences that are a cut above most of what is available today," said Alphonso. "Their refined approach is even more appealing to me as a lead level designer, and provides an excellent base for me to push on into the frontiers of gaming."

"I love Neil's considerable focus on advancing our players' experience, born-out by his refined design talent and stunning accumulation of knowledge while working on games such as *Killzone 2* and *Splinter Cell*," added Paul Wedgwood, owner of Splash Damage. "He's the perfect man to lead our team of really skilled level designers."

Alphonso marks the most recent hire in a drive that has seen Splash Damage double the size of its development team in the past year.

www.splashdamage.com

Warner Interactive has appointed Laura Fryer as general manager of its Seattle studios.

Fryer's new position sees her in charge of Warner Interactive's internal development studios Monolith Productions, which made *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin*, and Snowblind Studios.

"Laura's extensive career demonstrates her great understanding of the process and her ability to innovatively grow our development studios," said Samantha Ryan, Warner Interactive's senior vice president. "Utilising her expertise to direct our Seattle studios in several key areas, we are looking forward to developing quality games under her leadership."

Fryer was one of the first members of Microsoft Game Studios, and brings experience from her time as executive producer.

www.warnerbros.com

Turbine has appointed Ken Surdan as its new vice president of operations.

Surdan was previously senior vice president of technology at TripAdvisor Media Network, with stints at SmartBargains.com and online travel company National Leisure Group.

In his newly secured position, Surdan will be responsible for overseeing operations on a worldwide scale, including project management, customer service and support.

"I've had the good fortune to work with some of the best online organisations in the business, but Turbine really brings something unique to the table in terms of its proven ability to operate massive online games, as well as manage the complex online ecosystems which surround each of their multiple titles," said Surdan.

www.turbine.com

Derby-based independent **Strawdog Studios** has hired two new team members. Former freelance music promotion producer James Curran *(above left)* joins the developer as an artist and animator, while former Derby University computer games student David Haywood *(above right)* has assumed a programming role.

www.strawdogstudios.com

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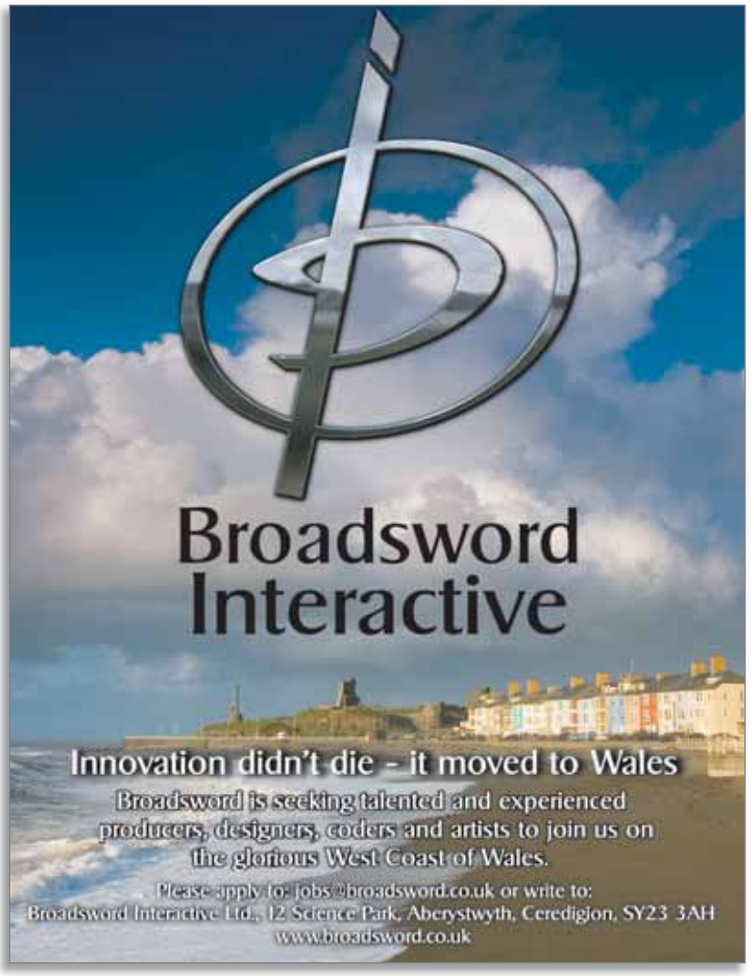
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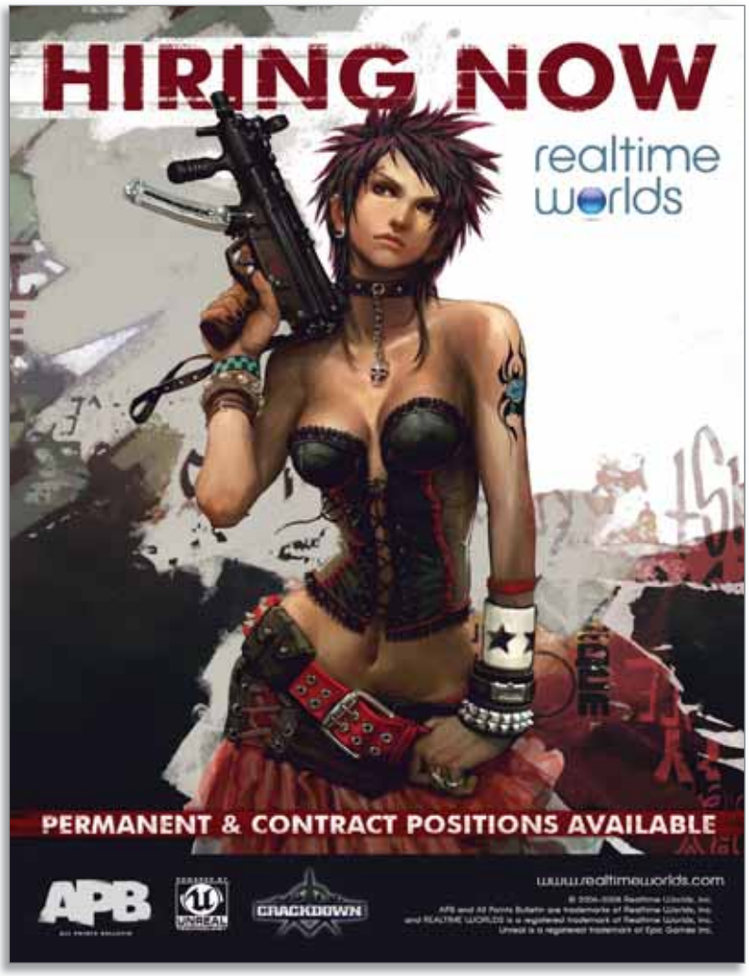

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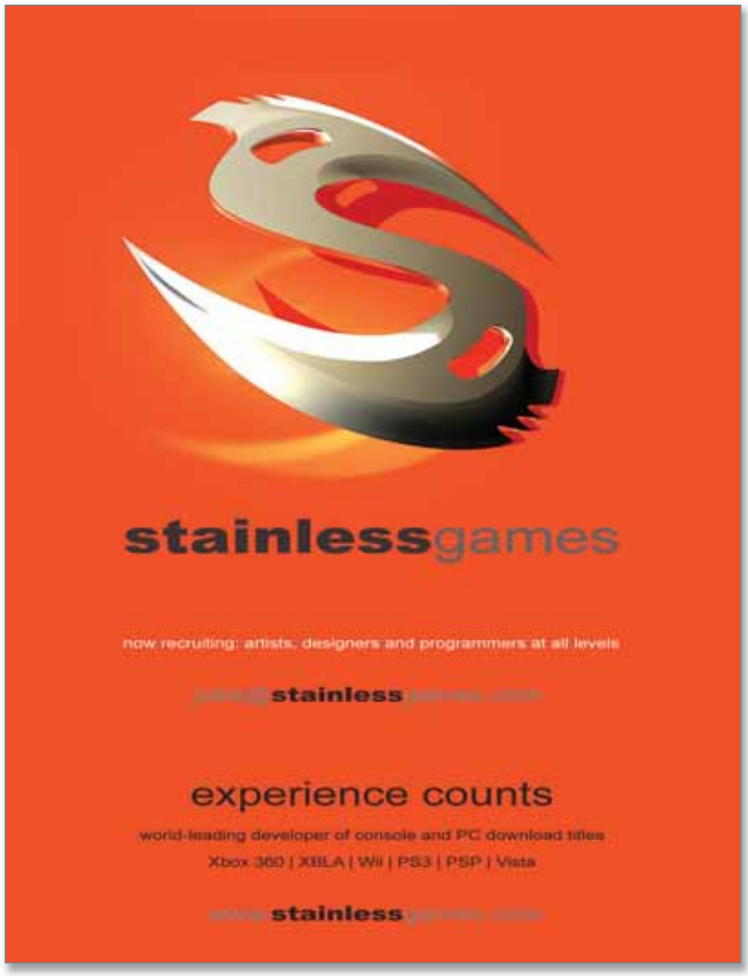
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Tools News

Crytek announces CryEngine 3

Crytek has announced the third version of its CryEngine game development platform.

CryEngine 3 works on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, DirectX 9 and DirectX 10, and is 'truly next-gen' ready according to the firm, with 'scalable computation and graphics for all major upcoming platforms'.

The German developer showcased the engine, and its new Sandbox 3 'What You See Is What You Play' editor, at this year's Game Developers Conference in San Francisco.

"With CryEngine 3 we are delivering our best game development technology that enables our clients to achieve their vision on current and future platforms to develop games such as MMOs, action games and more," said Cevat Yerli, chief executive officer and president of Crytek.

"Our complete game engine solution enables realtime development, ensures teams are able to maximise their own creativity, saves budget and creates greater gaming experiences. Also with our solution developers can start working on their next generation games today."

www.crytek.com

Xaitment secures two new customers

Gas Powered Games and Forterra Systems have signed up to use German studio Xaitment's BrainPack AI engine bundle.

The BrainPack, which is built on xaitFramework 2.5, provides studios undertaking the early stages of a game's development with a suite of AI tools to implement artificial intelligence, especially in the areas of advanced AI, decision-making and behaviors.

"It's really great to see the incredible new AI tools that Xaitment has been working on," revealed Chris Taylor, CEO and founder of Gas Powered Games, which created *Dungeon Siege* and *Supreme Commander*.

Valete Hopkins, program manager at serious gaming and virtual world specialist Forterra Systems added: "Xaitment provides an outstanding value to Forterra Olive developers who require realistic NPC AI. This technology will allow Forterra partners to rapidly create and deploy virtual worlds for a wide variety of applications."

www.xaitment.com

Emergent reveals Gamebryo LightSpeed

Emergent has announced the latest addition to the Gamebryo family: Gamebryo LightSpeed, a new solution for rapid prototyping and iteration of games.

The technology is based on the company's proprietary Gamebryo solution, adding an entity system on top to get developers prototyping new ideas as quickly as possible.

It also features live updates on consoles without recompiling, allowing new content to be dropped in or parameters tweaked with immediate feedback on the target machine itself.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on redundant game technology development worldwide," said Geoffrey Selzer, CEO of Emergent Game Technologies.

"At a time when the industry is restructuring and new studios are forming, not a single developer should be building its own technology from scratch. Gamebryo LightSpeed has been created from its first line of code based on the needs of game programmers and designers who develop in a wide variety of game genres."

www.emergent.net

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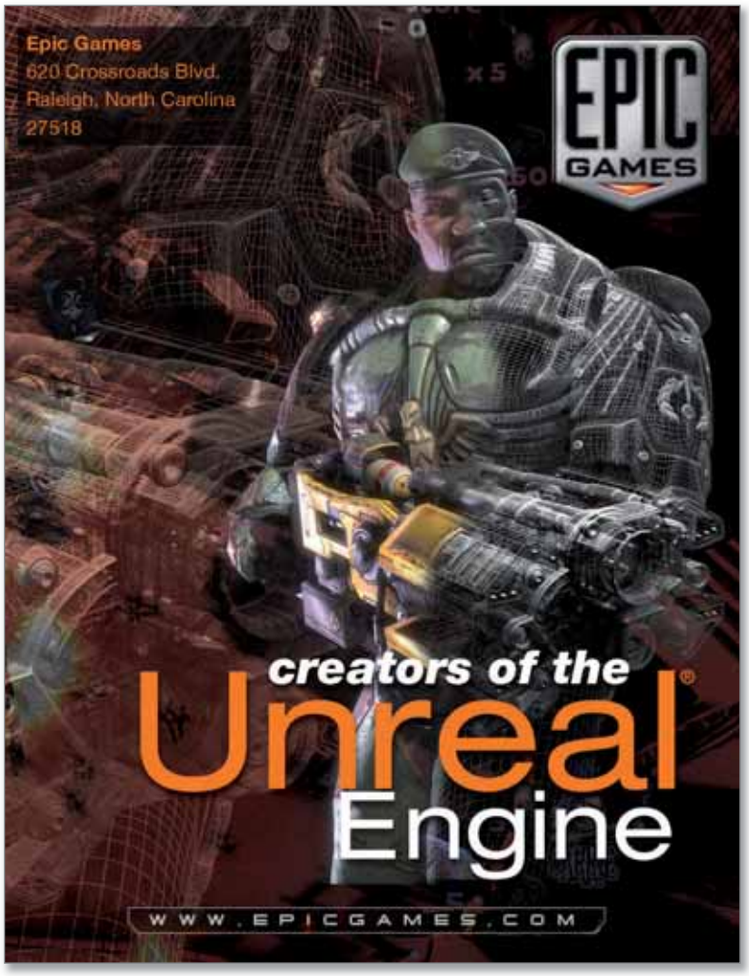

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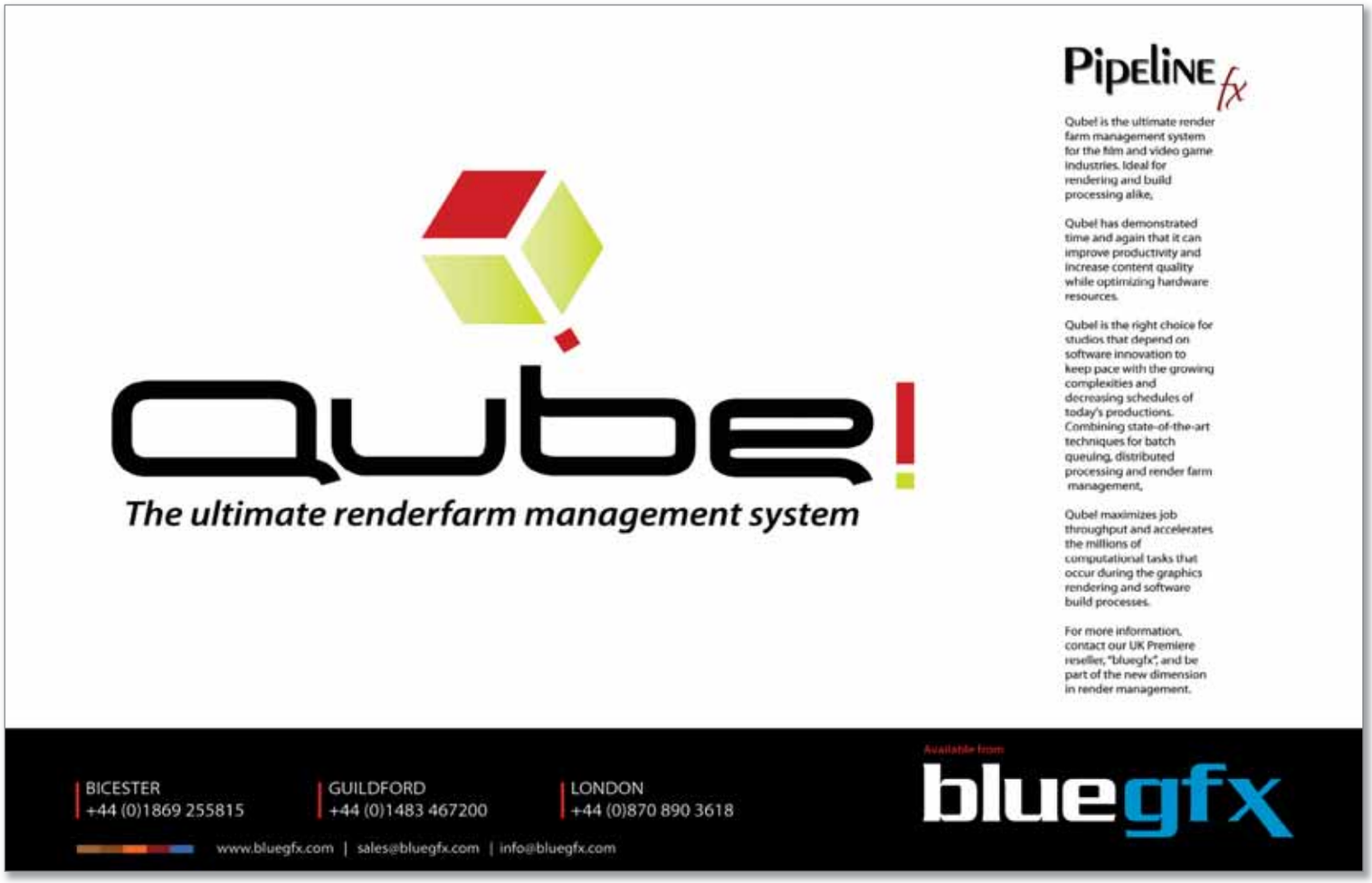
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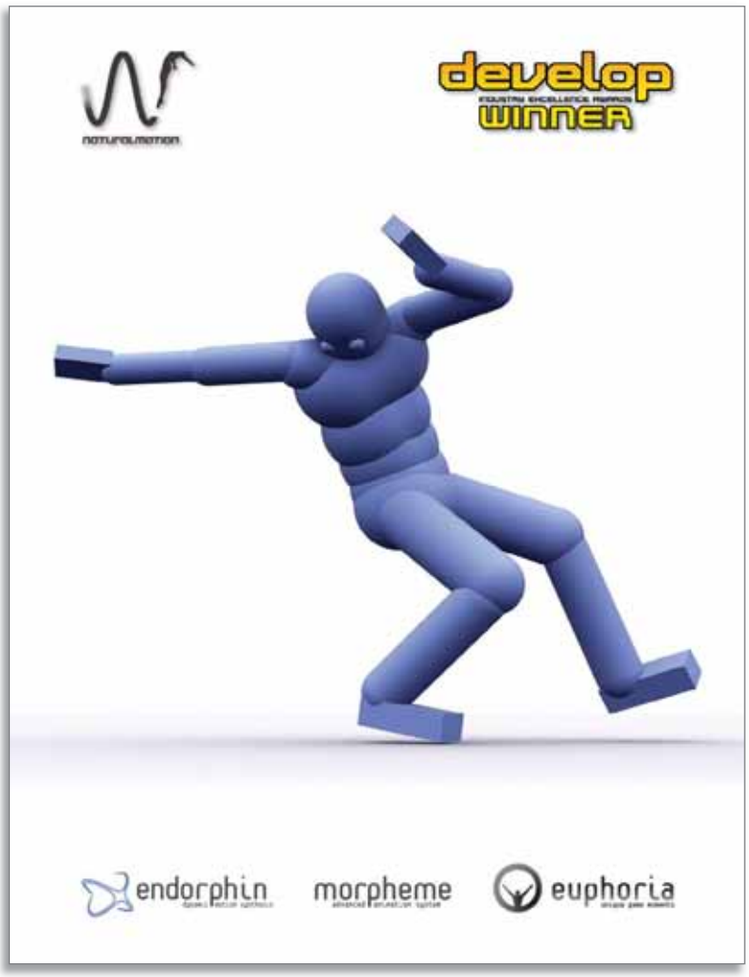

Tool Spotlight

SUBSTANCE AIR

Area of Expertise:
Texturing middleware

Substance Air is Allegorithmic's forthcoming texturing middleware solution, which is currently in its final beta stage.

The technology is designed to enable users to create high quality textures that fit in kilobytes whilst remaining lightweight, dynamic and infinitely versatile. Air replaces ProFX and includes a new authoring tool named Substance Editor.

Thanks to being written in a proprietary format equivalent in size to a text file, textures that would require gigabytes of storage space in bitmap format only need a few kilobytes. This is achieved by leaving the generation of bitmaps to the run-time engine at install or load time.

The Substance Editor interface offers a node-based system that provides a completely non-linear process. Textures can be finished without being fixed as with bitmaps, leaving studios that adopt Substance Air free to make changes at any time.

Textures created in Allegorithmic's middleware solution are also designed so that they can be applied to customisation and user content generation tools, meaning players can personalise assets in-game.

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Services News

Babel forms two strategic partnerships

Translation and localisation specialists Babel Media has entered a strategic partnership with audio company VoiceWorks Productions and support firm Game Centre Group.

Babel, which offers QA, translation, audio recording and localised print among its outsourcing services, is hoping to provide time and cost saving benefits by streamlining and combining production through the alliance with VoiceWorks.

"Babel is always looking for innovative ways to improve our clients' time to market and save them money in the process. That is our value proposition," said Richard Leinfellner, CEO of Babel Media.

Meanwhile, the Game Centre Group deal is designed to provide a joint global customer support service for online games and MMOs. Babel's European teams will be linked with Game Centre's US facilities to provide a combined service for the North American and European markets.

"I am proud to be partnering with Game Centre Group who share our vision of delivering world-wide high quality services," added Leinfellner.

Babel is also expanding the size of its operation, having announced plans to develop its Montreal facility.

www.babelmedia.com

Partnertrans appoints new head of sales

Localisation and QA agency Partnertrans has hired Andrew Chorzelski as head of sales for Europe.

Starting with immediate effect, Chorzelski will be assuming responsibility for PC, console and mobile business development, and will join the team at the company's newly founded Slough office.

Having worked in the UK games industry for over 20 years, Chorzelski brings previous experience as director of sales EMEA for Trymedia, the digital download games division of Macrovision.

Chorzelski has also worked in senior roles at companies including Jaleco Entertainment, Cosmi Europe and US Gold, where he served as marketing director.

"I'm excited to be joining the Partnertrans team," revealed Chorzelski. "Here's an organisation poised for major expansion in Europe. The company is at the cutting edge of what is happening in the localisation space, not just delivering end-to-end solutions for games translations, but working on major MMORPG titles for publishers with the complexities involved."

"We are pleased to welcome Andrew to the Partnertrans team," added founder and CEO of Partnertrans Markus Ludolf. "With his strong background in solution sales and relationship marketing and deep understanding of how games publishers work, he will be invaluable to guiding our clients on how to achieve the best possible outcome for their end users' experience."

Formed in 1998, Partnertrans has continued to expand its operation on an international scale, and now holds buisness in Europe, North America and Asia. The company offers a range of services covering all language-related fields including translation, vocie recording, linguistic QA and language specific content creation.

In addition to Partnertrans' flagship office in Germany and the new premises in the UK, the company is soon to expand into other, unconfirmed territories.

www.partnertrans.com

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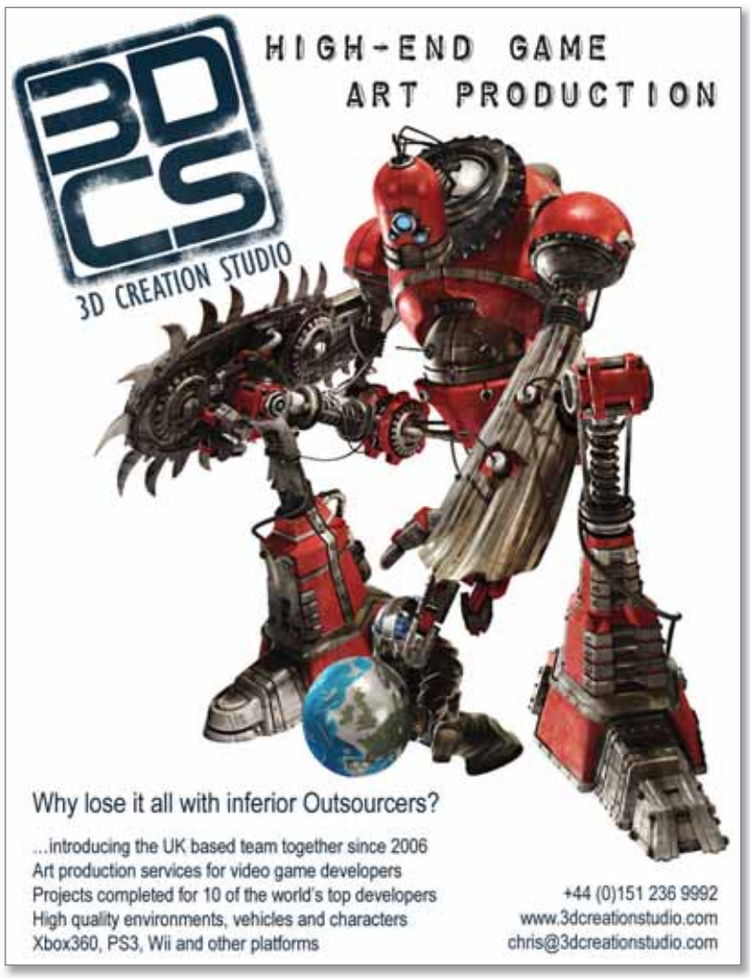
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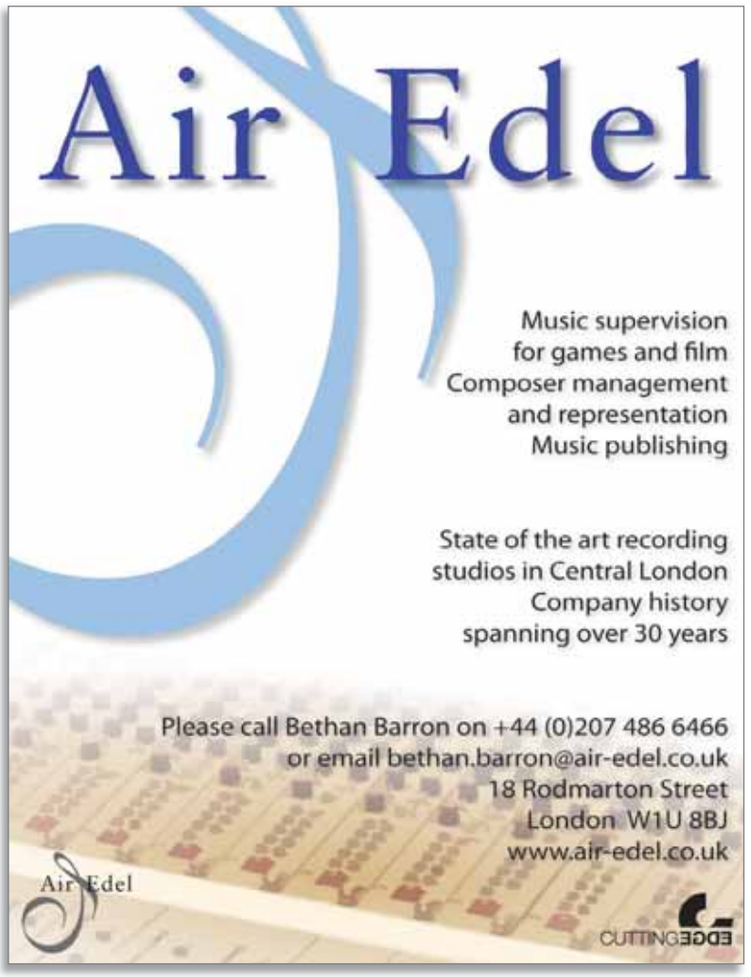

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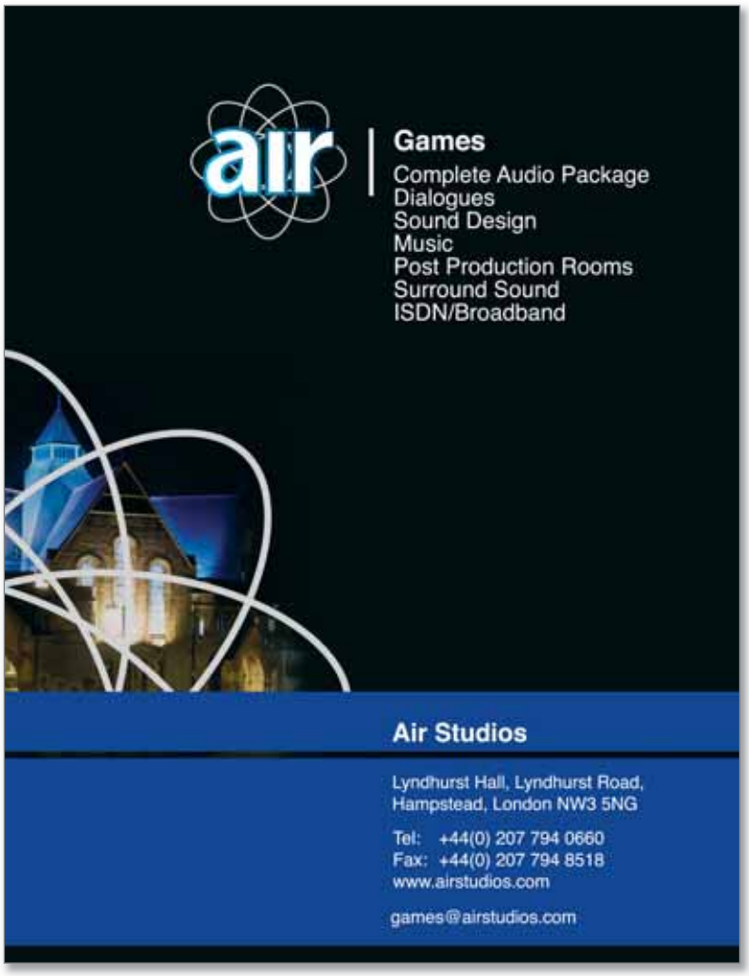

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TRAINING NEWS

DarkMatter Designs scoops Ones To Watch BAFTA

DarkMatter Designs took home the Ones To Watch gong at the recent Game British Academy Video Game Awards as a result of its progress in the Dare to be Digital programme, held in association with Abertay University.

Team members Adam Westwood, Graham Ranson, Yves Wheeler, Matthew Booton, and Owen Schwehr scooped the honour for their unique side-scrolling physics-based game *Boro-Toro*.

DarkMatter Designs was one of three teams that emerged as winners of Abertay University's 2008 Dare to be Digital competition before being nominated for the Ones To Watch BAFTA award. The ongoing initiative charges teams of students to spend 10 weeks working on a game prototype in a specially equipped 'hothouse'.

The BAFTA judges were extremely impressed with a number of *Boro-Toro's* features, chiefly its timeliness: although the game was developed in the summer of 2007, physics-based games – and specifically platformers – are all the rage in the indie circuit, giving the game a great commercial potential. Also praised was the tightness of the level designs and ingenuity of several of the puzzles, which were surprisingly polished for a ten-week development cycle.

In addition, the wide range of visual themes and accompanying ambient music were specifically noted as being very atmospheric and impressive given the small team.

"Congratulations to DarkMatter Designs on winning this highly prestigious award. It is the icing on the cake following their success in Dare to be Digital 2008, and I wish them every success in their future careers," said professor Bernard King CBE, principal and vice-chancellor of Abertay University.

"It's great to see how Dare to be Digital is encouraging and enabling the development of new talent throughout the UK and beyond. We at Abertay University are proud to have pioneered the concept of work-based simulation on which Dare to be Digital is based, and on a personal note I am very proud to see an Abertay team among the winners for a second year running."

www.daretobedigital.com

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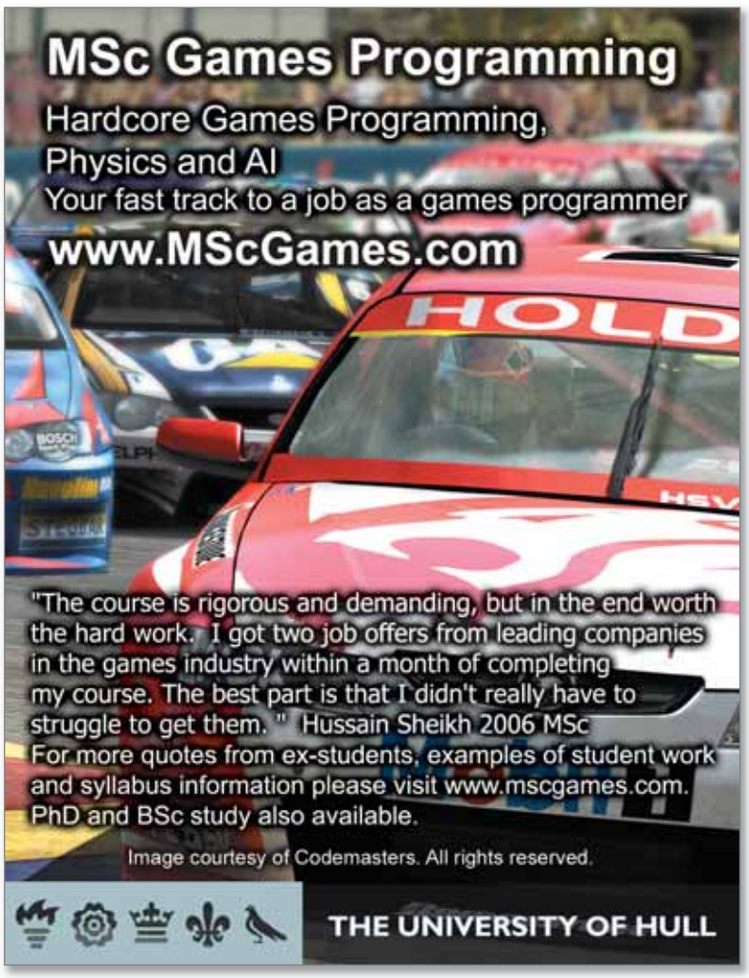
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MY FAVOURITE GAME

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by Miles Jacobson
Managing Director, Sports Interactive

My favourite game of all time is *Starquake* on the ZX Spectrum. It was made by a guy called Steve Crow and published by a small indie publisher called Bubble Bus software.

What made it so special was that it was an Ultimate Play The Game rip-off, but was better than the game it was ripping off.

I played *Starquake* for dozens and dozens of hours when I was much younger, and I still dig up a Spectrum emulator now and again.

And I still own my copy of the original.

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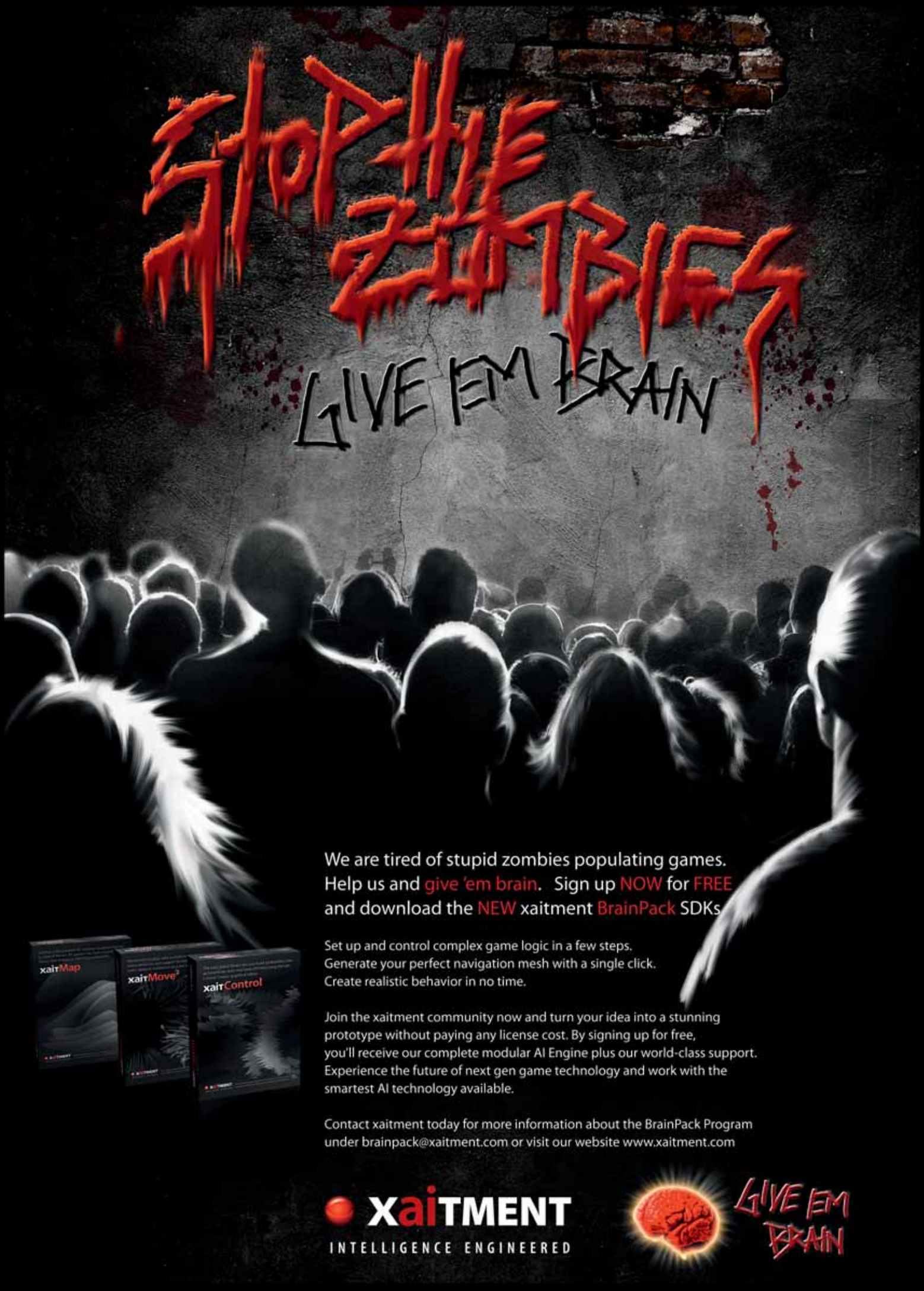

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"bluegfx have continuously demonstrated their ability to implement solutions, offer a consistent, high level of technical expertise and knowledge of their customers' business. They also exhibit an overwhelming commitment towards customer service," says Pete Baxter, SeniorDirector, Autodesk North Europe.

"By building a strong relationship with Autodesk, they are now one of the most successful Media and Entertainment resellers in North Europe. We look forward to this continuing long in to the future."

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